Six Speed

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Summary

Yugi wins a tournament. Kaiba is acting so normal about it.

Or

Two unhealthy people try their best in a relationship. Their best is highly concerning.

Notes

I haven't wrote in 15 years, and I wrote this all in three nights in my Apple note. I'm sorry for any glaring grammatical errors and the likes.

Chapter 1: never slow down

The championship had ended three days ago, and the high Yugi had been riding from his win was starting to simmer down in the aftermath; not for a lack of constant reminders, though. Not because of the trophy sitting on his desk or the endless stream of congratulatory messages from friends and former opponents, but because every reporter, every interviewer, and every fan seemed fixated on the same question. What did Kaiba think? Had Kaiba contacted him? Did this finally settle who the better duelist was? As if Yugi's accomplishments couldn't stand on their own without being measured against Seto Kaiba. It turned the usual sweet feeling of a win into something a little more sour.

The frustrating part was that Yugi couldn't entirely blame them. Even after all these years, some stubborn part of him still wondered what Kaiba thought; whether he would have been impressed (when was he ever?). Winning had felt good. It had felt earned. Yet there had still been a moment, standing on that stage with the crowd cheering around him, when he'd caught himself looking for a familiar white coat among the audience. Not because he needed Kaiba's approval. He absolutely didn't. But in the history of his time dueling, Kaiba had always been there in some capacity, whether it be as an obstacle, a challenger, or an impossible standard that pushed him farther than anyone else ever could. The absence felt sharply noticeable.

Kaiba himself had been unusually silent. Yugi imagined that he had seen his win one way or another, whether through social media, regular media, or mutual "friends" (in the unlikely circumstance that Kaiba would let himself use such a word). Yugi wasn't sure what he expected, or even wanted. Life had been different in the last few years; quieter, lonely, even. His friends had primarily moved on to different careers, different lives; some had moved out of the country entirely. Anzu sent postcards from cities he had to look up on a map. Jou called when he remembered the time difference, which was rarely. He primarily talked to them through texts and memes now a days, the way it felt everyone socialized in this day and age.

Yugi found himself almost feeling a little stagnant, still working to help his grandfather out after his mother had recently moved out with her long-time boyfriend. He hadn't had many opportunities to branch out despite the urging from his grandfather to go and live his life; some nights he wondered, quietly, if his best years had already

happened and he'd been too young to notice he was inside of them. It seemed like Kaiba had been his only constant through the years.

Kaiba had spent three days trying to convince himself he didn't care.

He had meetings to attend, contracts to review, investors demanding his attention, and an entire corporation depending on him. Rationally, there was no reason for Yugi Mutou's tournament victory to occupy even a fraction of his thoughts. He had built his life precisely so that nothing could occupy his thoughts without his permission. That was the entire point of it; the schedule, the discipline, the walls. A man who controlled every variable could not be blindsided by any of them.

And yet, it kept happening. Social media, a stray newspaper that had made its way to his desk, even Mokuba had brought it up over dinner with an infuriatingly knowing smile.

"Did you see Yugi won his tournament-" Mokuba had started to slide his phone over to Seto's side of the table with a cheeky grin, and he had stopped him midway with his hand. Mokuba giggled; actually giggled, at him, and took his phone back. Seto shot him another annoyed look, one that was known to strike fear in the hearts of a lesser man. It just served to amuse his little brother. Mokuba had grown up alongside that look; he was immune to it the way a person grows immune to a sound they've heard every day of their life.

"Why would I want to see that?" he said flatly; perhaps convincing to anyone else, but not in the least bit convincing to Mokuba. His brother gave him a knowing smile and rolled his eyes as he set his phone back down on his lap. "No reason," Mokuba said, in the tone of someone who had every reason filed away for later.

The worst part was that Kaiba wasn't actually annoyed that Yugi had won; not in the least. Of course he had won. He expected nothing less of him. Yugi had always been exceptional at everything he did; duel monsters, puzzles, games, social situations, whatever he set his mind to he seemed to excel in. No, what bothered him was something far less rational. He hadn't been there. Some other crowd had watched Yugi reach the top of something, some other set of eyes had been the last thing Yugi looked for before the cameras swallowed him; and Seto had been in a boardroom, signing his name to things he would not remember by morning. It felt, absurdly, like theft.

The realization irritated him enough that he buried himself in work for three straight days, hoping it would eventually disappear. It didn't.

He wouldn’t let himself think on this too much, and the not-thinking took more effort than any contract on his desk.

Eventually, as if on autopilot, he found himself standing outside Kame Game, only a short time before closing hours. At that point, showing up felt less embarrassing than continuing to pretend he didn’t want to.

The bell above the door rang. Yugi looked up from behind the counter, and felt a small spark of anxiety somewhere deep in his gut, threatening to rise up. He was not particularly surprised; Kaiba had come by many times through the years unannounced, but it had still thrown him off guard.

“Kaiba, what a surprise; how are you?” Yugi greeted him cheerfully, feeling a little over-enthusiastic. How embarrassing. Seto stood in the doorway with his hands in his coat pockets, giving a brief look around, looking entirely too expensive for the family’s cramped little game shop, the way a thoroughbred looks wrong tied up outside a corner store.

“Mutou.” His voice was flat, and Yugi deflated a little bit at the response. He wasn’t sure what he expected. Yugi folded his arms. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I want a rematch.”

Yugi gave a small laugh, and leaned over the counter on his elbows, his head in both hands as he gave Kaiba a once-over. He was as handsome as ever, in an all-black shirt that looked expensive beyond anything Yugi would, or could, ever want to spend on himself; tight black work slacks, and a silver and grey houndstooth jacket that Kaiba was now removing and folding over his arm. Yugi brought his eyes back to his; deep blue and hidden behind thick black eyelashes, and—he had to stop himself from thinking further.

“You came all the way here for that?” Yugi said softly, a mix of honor and disbelief.

“I came all the way here because your win was unsatisfying,” Kaiba said coolly, the emotions on his face impossible for Yugi to read.

“There it is.” He couldn't help but laugh.

Kaiba stepped further into the shop, letting the door shut behind him. The bell gave a small, final sound, and something about it made the space feel suddenly private.

“You won against every opponent they put in front of you. Barely a challenge, if you ask me.”

Yugi gave a small, indignant scoff. “I earned my win. I’m not sure what you’re trying to imply.”

“I’m not implying anything. I’m telling you that none of them deserved to be across the table from you.” It came out sharper than a compliment should, almost an accusation, and Kaiba seemed to hear it a half-second too late; his jaw tightened, and he looked away toward the shelves as though the card displays had personally summoned him.

Yugi blinked, momentarily wrong-footed. “That’s almost a nice thing to say.”

“It wasn’t meant to be nice. It was meant to be accurate.”

The argument, if you could truly call it that, continued until Grandpa finally emerged from the stock room carrying a box of inventory. He caught their attention briefly, and they immediately went back to their banter. He looked knowingly from Kaiba to Yugi and sighed the sigh of a man who had witnessed this exact dynamic for years; the sigh of someone who had stopped expecting it to resolve and started treating it like weather. There was no real malice behind their words, not anymore; both Yugi and Seto were young adults now, long gone were the days of any true anger behind their “rivalry.”

The duel began after closing.
The front sign was flipped to CLOSED. The lights dimmed. The familiar hum of the city faded into the background behind the windows as Yugi pulled down the blinds. For a moment, Yugi was hit with a wave of nostalgia for his younger years; long summer nights of after-hours duels with friends, the muted laughter of everyone gathered in one place. It gave him a warm feeling somewhere behind his ribs, and on its heels, a colder one; all of those people were elsewhere now, and the only one who still showed up was the one who had never claimed to be a friend at all.

The duel was not like those fun and casual matches of his childhood, though. As always, Kaiba was intense and relentless; too focused and serious to reenact the easy nights of Yugi’s childhood. Every move Yugi made was anticipated. Every strategy he deployed was countered. It reminded Yugi why dueling Kaiba always felt different. There was no room for complacency. Kaiba demanded everything

from him every single time they faced each other. Hell, Kaiba demanded everything from Yugi whenever they stood in the same room. Somewhere over the years, Yugi had stopped resenting that pressure and started relying on it. If he thought a little harder about it, which he tried hard not to, he would recognize that he craved it; that of all the things that had gone quiet in his life, this was the one that still asked something of him.
Across from him, Kaiba was having similar thoughts he refused to acknowledge.

No matter how many duelists emerged, no matter how many champions came and went, none of them ever held his attention for long. They won. They lost. They disappeared, and he forgot their names with an ease that should probably have troubled him more than it did. Yugi had never had the decency to disappear. He had stayed lodged somewhere in Kaiba's mind for years, occupying space Kaiba had not consented to give him, immune to every method Seto had ever used to evict a distraction. He had never liked the idea of Yugi belonging to the rest of it; to the tournaments, to the fans, to the long parade of opponents who got to sit across from him and call it a privilege. The thought had always sat wrong.

Yugi was different; and something in the back of Seto's mind had long since registered that it had little to do with duel monsters.

It was, he decided, an aggravating thing to know.

When the final turn ended, neither had won. A draw. Yugi dropped into a nearby chair. Kaiba stared at the table as though personally offended by the result.

"Most people would call that a good game," Yugi offered, adjusting himself and looking at Kaiba with a small smile.

"I don't care what most people think."

Yugi sighed, but didn't have a retort.

"You were holding back." Yugi groaned, not bothering to make it sound like a real complaint.

"You were."
"I wasn't."
"You were."
"I really wasn't."

At some point the bickering lost its heat, settling into something lazier; the way friends needled each other for the comfort of it. Yugi had offered to show him the new structure deck he'd been tinkering with, a flimsy excuse, and they both let it stand. The stairs creaked under them. It struck Yugi, distantly, that Kaiba had been up here more times than he could count over the years, and yet had never once climbed these stairs for a reason that wasn't a duel or a deck or some excuse stacked on top of another excuse. He followed Yugi up the way he followed Yugi into everything; close, certain, as though the invitation were a formality he was indulging.

One moment they'd been standing among shelves of card packs and board games. The next they were in his bedroom above the shop, still arguing as casually as two coworkers trading small talk over a water cooler; except for the part of Yugi that had gone quietly, electrically alert.

Yugi found himself watching Kaiba as he paced near the window, less focused on the banter and more focused on Seto himself. The exhaustion hidden beneath his confidence. The rare moments when his guard slipped just enough to reveal the person beneath the CEO, beneath the genius, beneath the impossible reputation; just Seto. He wondered how many people ever got close enough to see that side of him. The thought arrived with an ugly little companion: a hope that the answer was none. He recognized it as jealousy, felt betrayed by it, and was quietly alarmed by how easily it had surfaced, as though it had been waiting under the floorboards of him for some time.

Kaiba was silent as he looked around Yugi's space, still looking out of place as he often did when he was out of his element. He knew this bedroom all too well, though. He knew where Yugi kept his cards. He knew which trophies belonged to which tournaments. He knew the view from the window, overlooking the small takeout Korean restaurant across the street and the adjacent apartments. Over the years he'd accumulated these details without meaning to, or so he told himself; he was not in the habit of memorizing rooms, and had never been able to explain why this one had been the exception. He had simply never once stood here while it meant anything other than a game.

"You know what your problem is?" Yugi finally asked. He cringed slightly, realizing how accusatory he had sounded.

Kaiba scoffed, tensing at the sudden break of silence. He turned to look at Yugi.

“You’ll have to be more specific.”

“You act like every duel between us is life or death.”
“It is.”
“No, it isn’t. That’s silly, Seto.” Kaiba looked slightly disarmed at the use of his first name.

“It is when it’s with you.” Yugi’s eyes widened slightly, wondering how to possibly interpret that response. Always so intense and dramatic, he thought passively, though the thought rang a little hollow even as he had it. Kaiba looked away almost immediately, but Yugi caught the strange expression on his face; something akin to longing.

Yugi felt something tighten painfully in his chest.

Oh.

He couldn’t deny the undertones now. The room suddenly felt too small, the air too thick. Was he just getting in his own head?

Yugi slowly stood.
“Kaiba.” No response.
“Seto.” That finally got his attention; he always seemed to visibly soften when Yugi used his first name, much to his own annoyance. It was a small, humiliating tell, and they both knew it was there now.

Yugi took a step closer.

“Why did you really come tonight?” Yugi offered quietly, feeling unusually bold for just a moment, despite the background static of nerves threatening to rise up again. He had a feeling he might know the answer.

Kaiba faltered for a moment, looked as though he was contemplating, and then made his move. He walked over to where Yugi had been standing by the bedroom door, in what Yugi would have described as uncomfortably close moments ago. The distance didn’t seem to bother him now.

Kaiba reached out, deciding to be just as bold back, and brushed back a blonde bang to test the waters. If Yugi had it in him to be straightforward, Kaiba certainly wasn’t going to back down from a new challenge. "Do you really want to know?" Yugi didn’t back away, but his cheeks instantly began to heat up, his internal monologue going wild. Fuck. What did he just get himself into?

Kaiba struck quickly, grabbing one of Yugi's wrists and pinning it above his head, the other pinned at his side. Yugi gasped but did not pull away. No words needed to be spoken. He understood why Kaiba had come here tonight now, and that small bubble of anxiety in the background was starting to resurface in his gut and rise toward his chest.

Inches away from Yugi's face, Seto asked, "Have you ever kissed anyone before?" Low, like a growl in his throat. Yugi swallowed hard, the color draining from his face.

"N-no," he managed, his throat going dry. He was not afraid, Seto surmised, but he was nervous. This was all happening so fast, so suddenly. This was not how he expected this night to go; not by a long shot.

"Good." There was something underneath the word, low and satisfied, that Yugi didn't have the experience to name but felt anyway; the sound of a man learning that a thing he wanted had not already been touched by anyone else. Kaiba closed the space between them easily, and was surprised himself at the instant electricity he felt when their lips connected. All these years of rivalry, of memories, hardships, battles fought and lost and won alongside each other, all leading up to this moment and clouding Yugi's judgment. He had no time to process any of it; his sexuality, his first kiss, all the muddled feelings in between, lost somewhere to the overwhelming flood of the physical.

Kaiba licked Yugi's lower lip and used his tongue to apply pressure, parting them, and was rewarded with a moan from Yugi. He felt him freeze up instantly, embarrassed at his body's response. Cautiously, Kaiba loosened his grip on his wrists and brought his hand down to caress his side, snaking an arm around his waist. Yugi seemed to melt into the touch and let himself be led; eagerly, in fact, to learn a thing or two.

"You sound gorgeous when you moan," Seto practically whispered, relishing the visible reaction of shock and pleasure it gave Yugi. Yugi felt like the ocean was in his ears; how utterly uncharacteristic, he thought, that he almost did not believe he'd heard anything at all.

With a few stumbling steps backwards, they ended up sitting on Yugi's bed. Yugi always seemed confident in everything he did. But Seto could guarantee that sex and intimacy was clearly new territory he had never even tried to cross.

Seto repositioned himself on the bed to crawl over Yugi, cupping his chin in his hand and meeting their lips together. Just like the first kiss, he felt fire pooling in his lower stomach instantly. Yugi tilted his head to the side to accommodate him further and Seto pushed his tongue past his teeth, caressing his tongue with it. Yugi gave a soft moan, and Seto gently pushed him back further on the bed, fully on top of him now and painfully aware of their significant height difference. Seto broke the kiss, only to leave a trail of kisses and small bites down the side of his neck and jaw; he lingered over one spot at the base of Yugi's throat, sucking until the skin bloomed, pulling back to look at the mark with a possessive satisfaction he didn't bother to hide.

His cock grew painfully hard as he listened to the needy gasps and moans of Yugi beneath him; highly reactive and receptive to his every touch.
Kaiba could feel Yugi getting decidedly needier beneath him, his nerves melting away into something more frantic to feel the fire between them. Seto experimentally put his hand on his upper thigh, and Yugi froze for just a moment, but relaxed almost just as quickly. He took it as consent. He continued up his thigh slowly as he kissed him hard again, using his other hand behind Yugi to comb through his gelled hair and give a gentle tug, eliciting a sensual gasp into his mouth. Yugi was nervous, but into this, was his takeaway. Kaiba moved his hand to massage Yugi's cock, palming him through the fabric of his jeans, and the friction only sharpened the want into something impatient. Not enough. Nowhere near enough.

He hovered for a moment, then started to slowly unzip Yugi's jeans, hesitating to see if there would be any resistance. There wasn't. Kaiba began rubbing his cock through the fabric of his boxers, noticing that Yugi had been leaking precum pretty heavily. He worked his way into the gap of the boxers and made contact with his flesh, eliciting a loud gasp from Yugi. Yugi's own mind was on fire; lust, nerves, caught up in the heat of the moment but strongly aware of the uncertainty threatening to break through the surface if he stopped for a moment to take a breath. He decided not to.

Kaiba gently ran his thumb over the head of Yugi's cock, smearing precum over the tip, and was impressed at how much of a mess he'd already made. Kaiba slowly began to pump him, hand slick, and almost instantly Yugi bucked into his hand inadvertently. Kaiba felt a rush akin to being high; he felt powerful, he felt hungry, he felt, for the first time in recent memory, that he was exactly where he was supposed to be. He used the hand woven into Yugi's hair to bring their faces back together, catching his mouth with his as he tightened his

grip.

Yugi's moan turned into a gasp and he suddenly broke the kiss. Yugi abruptly changed from soft and open to rigid, trying to sit up. Seto pulled back, and Yugi looked pale, mortified even. Immediately he began sputtering out apologies; Kaiba didn't understand initially, feeling a mix of annoyance and a brief flash of fear that he had done something wrong.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to al—" He tripped over his words as his mouth went dry and the rest of the sentence died in his throat. The look of shame on Yugi's face was telling, and elicited a small inkling of guilt somewhere in Seto's subconscious. Yugi had come into his hand.

"It's fine," Kaiba said coolly. In reality, he was feeling everything but fine; superior, lustful, prideful, and underneath it a hot streak of something close to triumph. He couldn't believe how quickly and how little it had taken to make Yugi come for him; how completely a man this composed in every other arena fell apart at the first honest touch. That it was his touch and no one else's that had ever done it sat warm and dangerous in his chest. He tried his best to suppress a small shudder.

"Let's get you a shower and try again, if you want." While phrased like an option, his steady voice much more suggested a command.

Yugi laid beneath him, hair wild from Kaiba's gentle pulling, face flushed with spent pleasure, lips swollen and eyes blown; there was no way he was leaving before they saw this through. Yugi nodded. It was silly. Kaiba was so used to commanding others that he was telling Yugi to go take a shower in his own house, and Yugi was so overwhelmed that he did not even give it a second thought. Now that the moment of spontaneity had passed, it would give him a chance to get cleaned up and cool off before they got their clothes off.

Yugi nodded sheepishly, wanting to look anywhere but at Kaiba. His face was burning and he was grateful for the out; grateful for any excuse to put a door between them for ninety seconds and remember how to be a person. While he had admittedly spent very little time fantasizing about his first time, this was not a scenario that had ever crossed his mind. He was already feeling incredibly self-conscious about his lack of experience (or, for more accurate terms, his absolutely no experience); now he practically felt like a child.

Yet Kaiba grabbed his face again, a little more firmly than before, and forced Yugi to look him in the eyes. He searched them for a nerve-wracking moment, and kissed him gently. “It’s fine. I mean that,” he said again as he broke away, and Yugi nodded, trying his best to believe him. He got up, a little awkwardly and stiff, and walked over to the bathroom and shut the door.

Kaiba slid up on Yugi’s bed. Without the heat of the moment between them, he too found that he was feeling incredibly awkward as he looked around the room. It was a much different world than the one Kaiba was used to; modest, middle class. Yugi kept his room neat for being a teenager; no, now officially an adult, although Seto could not imagine this room had changed much in the last decade. There was something almost unbearable about it, he thought; the smallness, the carefully-kept evidence of a life lived in one place among people who loved him.

Kaiba had grown up in rooms designed to impress and built to be cold. He had never once kept a trophy where he could see it from his bed. He almost felt unwelcome, and then, worse, he caught himself wanting to be welcome, which was a far more disquieting thing to want. He grabbed his phone to idly check work emails and scroll, chasing the unwanted thoughts away.

The sound of the shower stopped and Yugi opened the door; it seemed he understood the assignment. He smelled of some cheap, off-brand body wash that wafted on the steam from the bathroom. On anyone else, Kaiba may have been disgusted. On Yugi, Kaiba was entirely enchanted. His normally gelled and styled hair fell wet past his shoulders, lightly towel-dried but still dripping over his bare chest and back.

Even better, Kaiba dragged his eyes down across Yugi’s bare body, and almost immediately felt himself start to stiffen again. Yugi was on the petite side, but he had muscle tone, beautiful light skin with a pink undertone, and was all around naturally well-proportioned. A frayed pink towel sat low on his hips, and Yugi just stared back at Kaiba, feeling insecure under his stare. He had almost expected him not to be there when he came back out.

“Drop the towel,” Kaiba meant to say as a command, but with arousal clouding his brain, one may have mistaken it for a plea. Yugi hesitated for just a moment, and finally found his voice again.

“You’re still fully dressed,” he spoke up, if for nothing else, as at least

a way to stall. While a moment alone to breathe and the shower had helped push his anxiety down to an acceptable level, standing half-naked in front of Seto, the nerves stopped being a feeling and became a physical thing; a low hum under his skin he couldn't switch off.

"That I am." Seto made a move to take off his shirt, then paused, giving Yugi another glance. "Is this okay? That I get undressed?" Yugi nodded, giving a small breathless "of course" as he watched Kaiba begin to strip. He was mesmerized by Kaiba's well-toned body; tall, pale porcelain skin, thin but muscular and defined. Kaiba was someone who took care of himself and it showed, though there was a discipline to it that read less like vanity and more like a man keeping the one thing he owned outright in working order. Yugi did not even feel himself drop the towel. He almost felt numb. Was this even real life?

Kaiba recognized the absurdity of the moment; two young men just awkwardly gawking at each other naked. He almost wanted to laugh. Kaiba motioned to the bed with his head, and Yugi wordlessly walked over and settled himself back on it, no longer trusting himself to talk without a nervous stutter.

Kaiba sat down next to him and cupped his cheek, searching Yugi's eyes once again for any indication that he might not want to do this. He saw his anxiety, his insecurity, his uncertainty. But he saw the lust, and specks of something else. Trust? Love? The thought caused an unfamiliar feeling in his chest, like a hand squeezing his ribs. He pushed it to the side; he couldn't look at that now. If he looked at it, he might have to be gentle in a way that frightened him more than any of the rest of it did.

"Tell me you want this," Seto said, almost a whisper now, starting to close the gap between them. "If we do this, I'll tell you right now, I do not share." There was no theatre in it. He said it the way he said figures to a board; flatly, as a condition of the deal. No elaboration, but Yugi understood. He nodded, but Kaiba shook his head. "I need to hear you say it."

"I want this. I want you," he replied softly, and that was enough for Kaiba. He felt the familiar flame of desire flare up in his chest again, and he climbed on top of him.

Yugi could probably use, and probably deserved, more than this; more patience, more foreplay, the kind of unhurried first time someone should get. Kaiba knew that with the clinical part of his brain that

never fully shut off. The problem was that the rest of him had stopped listening. This was the thing about Yugi he could never explain to himself; the iron control he was famous for, the discipline that ran his entire life, simply did not apply in this room. It frightened him a little. He told himself he'd make it up to him later, and tried not to notice that the thought felt less like a plan and more like an apology.

Yugi tensed as he felt Kaiba's hand slide down between his legs again, cupping his ass and spreading his cheeks. A moment of panic surged through him. Everything was going so fast; he felt like his thoughts were moving in slow motion while the world sped by. This was really going to be his first time, with Kaiba, here in his childhood bedroom with his grandpa sleeping eight feet down the hall. Did he know what he was doing? Did he do anything? Was it going to hurt?

Kaiba hesitated as he noticed Yugi tensing up. He kept his fingers playing against his entrance, watching his face intensely now. Yugi's lips parted as though he wanted to say something, perhaps a protest, but he closed them just as fast and swallowed hard. He watched as Kaiba brought his hand back up, and relaxed for a moment, until Kaiba unceremoniously pressed those same fingers to Yugi's lips.

Yugi made a small noise of shock but did not resist, parting them; a little embarrassed that those same fingers had been stroking his ass moments ago. He laved his tongue over them clumsily, slicking them as best he could, the intimacy of it sending fresh heat crawling up his neck. Kaiba watched his mouth work with an expression that bordered on reverent, and filed the sight away somewhere he intended to keep it. As if reading his mind, he drew them back and brought them to his own mouth, covering them generously with his own saliva as well. He was acutely aware that he was terribly underprepared for this moment; and Yugi, of course, having nothing for lubricant.

"You're going to tense reactively. It's going to feel strange. Breathe in," Kaiba instructed low under his breath, close to Yugi's ear, as he reached back down to slide a slicked finger inside of him; questionably a little fast, but careful. One finger didn't necessarily hurt, but it certainly felt foreign. He could feel Yugi's muscles tensing around him, but Yugi took a breath in. "Breathe out and try to relax." Yugi let out a shaky breath, and Seto felt some of the tension around his finger lessen, though not by much. It would take some work.

The saliva dried quickly, so he worked with what he could, sliding his index finger out and slipping his middle finger in alongside it as he entered again.

Being stretched felt foreign, weird, but Yugi couldn't help but groan as Seto worked his fingers inside of him, twisting and stroking upwards. Seto pushed his fingers up hard and hit a spot that left Yugi breathless. He almost cracked a grin, satisfied that he'd found his prostate. He pulled out slowly and wet his fingers again, then pressed them back in. Yugi let out a breathless "fuck" and arched his hips, starting to break into a sweat.

"There," Seto murmured, mostly to himself, the way he might note a winning line three moves before he played it. "There you are."

Kaiba slowly began to withdraw his two fingers as he readied a third. Yugi was already impossibly tight around two, and he was cursing himself for not preparing better. Yugi flinched, clearly nervous, and opened his mouth to protest. Kaiba shook his head.

"It's going to be uncomfortable, but it'll hurt a lot more if you're not at least a little prepared." Yugi made a face, but didn't say a word. He wasn't even sure he remembered how to speak at this point. Kaiba pushed the third finger in and continued to work him, taking his time now, mouthing slow kisses along the inside of Yugi's knee to coax the tension out of him; guilty at how dry his fingers still felt, determined to make up for it in patience. For all the impatience clawing at him, he found he could be endlessly patient about this one specific thing; about making sure that whatever Yugi remembered of his first time, the memory belonged to Seto and was not ruined by him.

With his free hand he pushed himself up gently, careful not to pull his fingers all the way out, and pushed Yugi's legs further apart. He took just a moment to absorb the sight; three fingers deep inside the beautiful man beneath him, Yugi flushed with pleasure and nerves, vulnerable and trusting in a way Seto could have never imagined of him. It was gorgeous, and it was all his. He placed his own cock in the hand that had been inside of Yugi and teased his entrance with the head, meeting Yugi's eyes once again, searching for any last protests. He saw none. He spit on his cock and thrust his hips forward.

Yugi cried out and tensed again as he felt the head of Seto's cock sliding in as his three fingers slid out. Kaiba slowed to give Yugi time to adjust; the fingers had helped, but could not fully prepare him for the burn of being filled this way without proper lubrication. Kaiba

took his time pushing in, letting him adjust and relax around him, the initial burn fading faster than Yugi expected, replaced with a pleasure he could have never imagined.

Seto started out slow; Yugi was so tight it was almost painful, but insanely good. He knew immediately he was already close, the moment his pelvis met Yugi's ass, fitting snugly all the way inside. He gave some small, experimental thrusts and watched as Yugi gasped, breathless once again as he nudged up against his prostate. Once he was sure that Yugi would not break around him, and feeling as though he himself might break if he kept up the excruciatingly slow pace, he started to thrust harder.

Yugi saw white, blind with a mix of pain and pleasure, all other emotions temporarily washed away as he let the physical ones overtake him. The sensation of Kaiba filling him, hitting a spot inside that felt like sparks igniting through his lower body; the pleasure of the pain and the pain of being completely vulnerable to a man such as Seto. He felt himself on the edge again as he let the insanity of it all sweep him away.

Kaiba too found himself on the edge, and lost his brain somewhere in the feeling. He fucked into him with a wild hunger, chasing his own pleasure. His mind was a haze of possession; not the abstract idea of it but the specific, greedy fact of it, the knowledge that this body opening up under him had never opened for anyone else and, if he had anything to say about it, never would. He had disregarded all social grace, stopped pretending to play it cool. With no walls left up to filter the worst of his thoughts, he leaned down close to Yugi and spoke against his ear, almost tender for how terrible the words were. "Look at you. Nobody has ever had you like this. Nobody is going to."

It sent a visible shiver up Yugi's spine; he couldn't determine if this was dirty talk, bedroom talk, overwhelming lust. But it certainly sounded like a vow, and somewhere beneath it, a warning. A small spike of fear shot through his gut, but his body did not catch the memo. Yugi felt himself on the edge at the words, cock twitching, leaking generously all over Seto's stomach.

"Say you understand me." Seto's voice had dropped lower, rougher, his thrusting getting more frantic, his movements more erratic. If Yugi had not been so overwhelmed in the moment, this side of Kaiba would have possibly scared him; the absolute certainty in it, the way he wasn't asking so much as informing. If he had seen the intensity in those dark blue eyes just then, he may have been brought to tears.

Instead, it just fed him. “If anyone ever touches you, I’ll know. I’ll kill them, and then I’ll ruin myself, and I will not lose a single hour of sleep over it. You are mine. Say you understand.” It was not a question.

Yugi felt his eyes roll back; the edge of his second orgasm teasing him as Kaiba railed into him recklessly now. He wanted to hear more, he wanted to be more, he wanted to be owned by him. Fuck. They had both lost their minds, and the worst part,, was how much he liked the feeling of being someone’s *something* again.

“I understand,” he gasped, “I understand, please-" pleading for what, he didn’t know. It struck another fire within Kaiba to hear him surrender it so easily, so raw.

“Say my name.” Kaiba was rapidly approaching the point of no return. So was Yugi, his dick leaking desperately against Seto’s now-slick stomach, pulsing with his heartbeat. In one fluid motion Seto pushed himself up to see Yugi’s face; flushed, wild, fucked-out, gorgeous. He took the small wrists from where they were digging into him and brought them above Yugi’s head, holding them both in place with one hand, using his free hand to grab Yugi’s slick cock and begin pumping vigorously. Yugi yelled out, part shock and part pleasure. “Say my fucking name,” he panted as he slammed into him again, and Yugi complied.

“K-Kaiba-” he gasped out, and Kaiba thrust into him hard; he did not have to ask again, he knew what he wanted.

“Seto!” Yugi cried out as he felt the white sear of hot pleasure tear through him, seed spilling all over Kaiba’s fist and hitting his stomach. The sound of his own name in Yugi’s wrecked voice was what set Kaiba over the edge.

Yugi could feel him filling him with nothing more than a sharp exhale and a tighter grasp on the wrists he was holding. Kaiba buried himself deep into Yugi as his orgasm ripped through him but stayed silent, to the disappointment of his partner. Yugi had so desperately wanted to hear him cry out, too.

Experimentally, Yugi flexed his muscles inward and Kaiba gasped, feeling the last of his seed being squeezed from him. He lowered himself with caution down to Yugi’s level again, as though afraid that after the heat of the moment this would somehow implode; that he would be thrown off, or that they would simply break in some way.

For a man who had just spoken about ruin so freely, he handled the aftermath like something that might shatter. He studied Yugi's face for a moment in silence, lips ghosting over his, searching for signs of fear or regret. He found none. Yugi himself craned up the small gap to close the space between them with a chaste kiss, and smiled weakly. The kind of bliss written on your face that could only come from a first-time haze.

Kaiba brought his hands to Yugi's face gently and kissed him more deeply as he slid himself out; gently, Yugi's face twisting into discomfort as he registered how sore he actually felt when things were all said and done.

"Are you okay?" Seto asked softly, and after Yugi gave an affirmative nod, he quickly followed with, "I meant what I said. About anyone who tries to touch you." The lust was gone from his voice now; it was calm, conversational even, which was somehow far worse than when he'd snarled it. "I don't share. I never have. I'm not going to start by sharing you."

Yugi swallowed hard. So it hadn't been dirty talk after all. Some distant, sensible part of him; the part that sounded a little like his friends, went very still and very alarmed, and pointed out, reasonably, that this was a deranged thing for a person to say to you during sex, doubly for after sex. That he should be scared. That he was, a little.

The problem was the other part. The part that had heard you're mine and felt something in his chest unlock rather than recoil; the part that had spent years being everyone's friend and no one's first thought, and found that being wanted this completely, this dangerously, filled a space he had refused to admit was empty.

"You can't actually mean that," he tried. It came out softer than he wanted, more question than challenge.

Seto just looked at him, calm and certain and entirely unembarrassed, and didn't answer; which was its own kind of answer. "I don't say things I don't mean," he said at last. "You of all people know that about me."

And that was the trouble- Yugi did know it. He had known it for years, across every table they'd ever sat at; that whatever else Seto Kaiba was, he was not a liar, and the things he promised, terrible or otherwise, he delivered.

“They won’t,” Yugi said finally, and hated how much he meant it. They won’t, because *there isn’t going to be anyone else.* He didn’t know when that had become true. Sometime in the last hour, maybe. Maybe years before that, and he was only now noticing.

Seto rolled to his side and propped himself up with one arm, and with the other reached a hand between Yugi’s legs, bringing his fingers to his ass and feeling Yugi involuntarily flinch. He frowned.

“Did I hurt you?” he asked flatly, but the tinge of concern couldn’t be hidden from his voice; and there it was again, the whiplash of him, a man who could threaten murder and check a bruise in the same breath, who seemed to see no contradiction in it at all.

Yugi looked at him through bleary eyes; he felt skittish. So much had happened within the last hour; confronting his sexuality, losing his virginity, being claimed like territory and then handled like something precious. Kaiba was overwhelming in a way that left no room for anything else, and Yugi was beginning to understand that being the focus of all that intensity was going to be its own kind of weather to live in.

“It’s sore. I’m sore.” He was almost hesitant to speak, and mulled over how strange it felt to be shy in front of Seto. Strange how sex could take your long-time friend and rival, someone you’d shared so many memories and experiences with, good and bad and everything in between, and turn such a normal, biologically motivated act into something that felt so heavy. He had never felt so unsure of himself when it came to Kaiba until the bastard had started kissing him. No matter how Yugi tried to untangle and analyze himself out of this dark and withdrawn feeling, he couldn’t seem to get past it.

“You should have said something. I would never hurt you,” Kaiba said matter-of-factly, and withdrew his hand. He settled for stroking the inside of Yugi’s thigh and propped himself on his side to stare at him.

Not what you said a few minutes ago, Yugi thought, a little cynically. Though that wasn’t right either, and he knew it; the two statements lived together in Kaiba without friction. I would never hurt you and I would destroy the world for you were, to Seto, the same sentence said twice. It disturbed Yugi in the sense that he knew, deep down, Kaiba would probably kill over him. Kill for him. The other part of him was disturbed by how much he had liked it in the moment; how much it had turned him on, made him feel needed and seen and chosen. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to, or even could bear to, examine that part

of himself further right now.

“It’s okay,” he managed to squeak out, throat feeling dry, suddenly feeling self-conscious again as the afterglow slowly faded. “It felt good.” He noticed a small grimace from Kaiba. “It felt amazing, even,” he reassured, suddenly feeling guilty for being dismissive. Kaiba kept a neutral expression, but something in his shoulders eased a fraction; he was, Yugi was realizing, far more invested in the answer than he would ever say.

Yugi reached out to run a hand down Kaiba’s chest; silly, how he was hesitant to touch him when he had just been deep inside his guts moments ago. This was all so new to him.

A comfortable, if not awkward, silence fell between them. What was next? Yugi had never done, well, anything like this at all. Kaiba had never stuck around even this long after sex; had, in fact, built an entire reputation on the opposite, on being gone before the other person had finished catching their breath. He hadn’t moved. He noticed that he hadn’t moved roughly the same moment Yugi did. Do they cuddle? Get dressed? Fight?

“I should go,” Kaiba stated, with a strain to his voice. Yugi couldn’t determine what it was from. A part of Yugi wanted him to, so that he could gather his thoughts; so he could mope, shower, cry, scream, breathe, text his group chat and ask what the fuck did I just do? So he could try and fight the feeling that he had just committed some terrible crime, or had one committed lovingly upon him.

“Do you want to stay the night? It’s late,” he found his voice saying instead, to the shock of himself and, apparently, of Kaiba. Kaiba looked like he was contemplating it; genuinely contemplating it, but shook his head anyway.

“I can’t,” he finally said, and Yugi felt himself frown. “Not this time,” he clarified quickly, and Yugi felt his stomach do a little flip at the implication; not this time being, from Kaiba, very nearly a love letter. Kaiba put his hand through Yugi’s still-damp hair and drew him in for another kiss, gentle and, dare he imply, loving.

Yugi was partly relieved, but unsure if he was ready to sit alone with his feelings. Kaiba got up and began to gather his clothes from the ground, taking a moment to grab the towel that Yugi had discarded earlier and handing it to him. Yugi tilted his head.

“You’ll want this if you don’t want to lie in a mess. I was going to help

clean you up, but you're already sore." He glanced down between Yugi's legs, where a pool of cum had already started to spill on the bedsheets, and something proprietary flickered across his face before he smoothed it away. Yugi shoved the towel underneath himself, unsure of what else to do, and nodded, too embarrassed to make a comment.

The silence felt deafening as Yugi watched Seto get dressed, and fuck, everything was feeling so weird now. Why did sex make things so weird? Was it just him? Was he just fucking weird? He inadvertently groaned out loud and laid back, earning a small glance from Kaiba as he finished pulling his boots back on.

Kaiba came back toward the bed and leaned down, kissing him again. It felt strangely natural to Yugi, for someone who had managed to make it to twenty years old without ever so much as holding hands with someone other than his mother.

"I'll see myself out." He paused at the door, one hand on the frame, and looked back at Yugi with an expression Yugi couldn't fully read; satisfaction and something quieter underneath it. "Goodnight, Yugi. I'll know if you need me." Which was, depending on how you held it up to the light, either a comfort or a surveillance. Yugi suspected Seto meant it as both, and saw no difference between them.

Yugi watched as he closed the door, and immediately reached for his phone. Tons of missed notifications, mostly friends chatting to one another, news apps, social media updates. He opened his text messages and debated. Who could he even tell about this? He opened and closed the app a few times, debating on saying nothing at all, but the thought of being alone with his own thoughts was almost too much to bear.

He toyed with the idea of different messages, typed and deleted a few sentences a good fifteen times, and settled finally on a simple "guys." to the group chat. He cringed; that was a little dramatic and unlike him, but he saw a few messages of ?? and hey, and took a deep breath. These were his friends, he reasoned. He could trust them. Does he tell them he lost his virginity? That he might be in love? That he's pretty certain he's gay (wow, the guy who wears leather and collars likes men? there was no way they didn't know)? That the most powerful and possibly most unhinged man either of them had ever met had just informed him, mid-orgasm, that he belonged to him now, and that the truly alarming part was how little Yugi had wanted to argue? Where does he even start?

He sighed and pulled the sheet up over himself, wondering why he had a tendency to bite off more than he was ready to chew. He shelved the idea of telling his friends, who would no doubt be concerned and unimpressed at his vague message and immediate ghosting. The dings from his phone would have provided a nice little dopamine boost any other time, if he weren't so lost in his own head.

What the hell had just happened? The ocean was back in his ears, louder now; and this time there was no one in the room to drown it out.

Chapter 2: miss me with that bullshit

Chapter Summary

> Yugi tells his friends a version of the truth. Kaiba, once again, has a normal one.

Chapter Notes

> Thx for reading my old lady nonsense. I forgot my cousins have my ao3 name so if they see this yall can bully me in the group chat

Yugi woke up the next morning, unsure if the night before had really happened. As soon as he moved and felt how sore he was, he was reassured; that was a pretty unmistakable pain in his ass. He noted, lying there blinking at the ceiling, that he didn't feel rested in the slightest. He felt like he'd been hollowed out and put back together by someone who hadn't read the instructions.

He rolled over and checked his phone, noting dozens of notifications from his friends in the group chat specifically @-ing him, plus a few individual messages besides. Anxiety started to rise up in his gut almost immediately, and he set the phone back down face-first on the mattress, as though that would make it stop existing. He wasn't ready to face the friend committee yet this early in the morning. The friend committee did not do mercy.

Yugi went through the motions of getting ready, climbing back into the shower and trying to do something about his hair, which he'd slept on damp and let dry in every wild direction at once. He combed through it with his fingers and a palmful of conditioner, and let warm water beat down on him for awhile as though it could permeate through to the soreness inside. He silently prayed he wouldn't be limping for the rest of the day. That would invite questions he absolutely could not answer at the breakfast table.

He skipped looking at himself in the mirror, threw on a black tank top and jeans, and walked out his bedroom door, hoping that staying in motion would keep his mind from sinking too deep. He just had to get through work. He just wanted to act normal for a few hours.

As he pulled his door shut, Grandpa Mutou was stepping out of his own at the same moment. He smiled at Yugi, though Yugi caught the

precise instant something halfway down snagged his attention. The smile faltered, then quickly recovered as his grandfather visibly decided to be a man of great and merciful discretion.

“Did you two get up to much last night?” he asked, and if Yugi didn’t know better, it almost sounded accusatory. Yugi felt his face go hot, praying with everything he had that it would either go unnoticed or that his grandfather would have the tact to let it.

“No, he left shortly after you went to bed,” Yugi managed; not quite a lie, not quite the truth either. He had serious doubts that they, or rather he, had managed to be quiet enough to fully escape the ears of a man sleeping eight feet down the hall. His grandfather nodded.

“I’ll make breakfast before we open up,” he said simply, turning to go, then pausing as if weighing something. “You might want a t-shirt today.” Then he went, continuing down the stairs.

Yugi stood there, confused, and went back into his room. As he passed the mirror he saw, with a flare of embarrassment, exactly what his grandfather had been referring to. A well-defined hickey, blooming purple near the base of his throat, gloriously exposed by the tank top. A regular shirt would cover most of it. Yugi pressed his temples between both hands and groaned into his empty room.

Coming back for the shirt, he realized he’d left his phone on the dresser and grabbed it. A new notification slid across the screen. Kaiba. He opened it before he could think better of it.
A simple: *How are you feeling?*

Yugi felt butterflies stage a revolt in his stomach. Good morning texts from Seto Kaiba. The concept was almost unthinkable; the man treated most pleasantries like a tax he resented paying.

Sore lol, Yugi texted back, aiming for casual, then immediately followed it with another message because he was a chronic double, triple, even quadruple texter and had made peace with this years ago. *How about you?*

He shoved the phone into his back pocket and caught himself smiling like an idiot. Embarrassing.

He followed his grandfather down the stairs and tried very hard to play it cool. He was really not trying to look like a lovestruck kid all morning, least of all in front of the man who had raised him.

Grandpa Mutou had been nothing but supportive, loving, and patient with Yugi his entire life. But Yugi had decided years ago, back when the first doubts about his sexuality had started circling, that this was the one boundary he could not bring himself to cross with him. Grandpa had been around a long time. Yugi was certain that in some capacity he already knew, especially now, with the evidence printed in plum on his grandson's neck. But saying it out loud was a different beast entirely.

He sat down at the table and discovered that sitting was its own special torment. He also discovered that eating got harder the more awake he became, the more his mind drifted back to the night before. He felt excited, happy, faintly disturbed, all of it at once and all of it stacked on top of how everything had actually gone down. He wanted to tell his friends. The bigger question, he realized, was whether it was even okay to tell his friends.

He found he was less worried now about outing himself (they knew. They had to know. Right?) and more worried about outing Kaiba without his permission, And there was no universe in which his friends would accept the bombshell that he'd lost his virginity without demanding, under interrogation lights, a full accounting of to whom.

Across the city, Seto Kaiba was suffering through a parallel ordeal, in the form of his brother's innocent bullying.

He'd barely sat down at the table for breakfast before he registered Mokuba eyeing him over the rim of a glass of orange juice, wearing a shit eating grin. Seto tried to ignore it. He failed, and sighed heavily instead.

"It is six in the morning. What could you possibly be this amused about?" he grumbled, trying to feign ignorance. Mokuba had never once bought that act, not in his entire life. Of every person on the planet, Mokuba was the single one who could read Seto with no instructions.

"You were out awfully late," Mokuba began, in a sing-song lilt, and Seto audibly groaned and dropped his face into one hand. "I bet you and Yugi had a lot of fun all night."

Seto shot him a withering look, the kind that reportedly made grown executives reconsider their life choices, and got nothing for his trouble but a delighted cackle. He had, he realized too late, confirmed the entire hypothesis without saying a word.

“So when’s my new brother-in-law coming over?” Mokuba pressed, half-joking, half-genuinely thrilled at the prospect of having Yugi around more often. “I bet I could get him on the PlayStation with me. He seems like he’d actually be fun, unlike some people.”

Seto groaned louder and put his head fully in both hands. “Don’t you have homework? School to get ready for?”

“It’s summer.”

“Then find something to do besides bother me.”

Mokuba only laughed again and turned his attention back to his phone.

Yugi apologized profusely for not eating, helped clear and put everything away, and got ready to open the shop. Then he took a deep breath and pulled out his phone again. No new notifications from the only number he was currently watching for, which was its own small disappointment.

Jou and Honda were no doubt still unconscious. Bakura was an infrequent texter at the best of times. Anzu, currently in America, was probably just winding down for the day on the other side of the world.

Well, he thought, thumb hovering over the four unread text messages from her. My time to shine.

He waited for his Grandpa to busy himself in the front and feigned needing to look for something in the back to call Anzu. Anzu was awake and because Anzu, he reasoned, would scream the least. This turned out to be a miscalculation.

“Yugi! Oh my god, you finally surface. We were about to file a report. What was guys, what does guys mean, you can’t just do that!”

“I have to tell you something,” he blurted, and then immediately wished he had planned literally any of the next several sentences. He could almost hear Anzu contemplating her response in the silence over the line.

“Okay,” Anzu said carefully. “I’m listening.”

He told her. Not all of it, of course. He couldn’t bare that. Yugi told her a curated, heavily redacted version that nonetheless contained the two load-bearing facts: that he had slept with someone for the first

time and that the someone was Seto Kaiba. He got both out in a single ungraceful rush and then held the phone slightly away from his ear in anticipation.

The reaction did not disappoint. There was a sound from Anzu that Yugi had previously only associated with kettles. Then, predictably, she, put him on speaker and was simultaneously typing into the group chat, because nothing in this friend group had ever once stayed contained between just two of them. He didn't mind- it saved him an awkward conversation with everyone later.

Within ninety seconds Honda had apparently been roused from the dead and was hounding Jounouchi for money from a bet they had once placed on Yugi's sexuality. If he wasn't so grateful for their easy and immediate acceptance, he might have felt offended.

They were, after a moment of absorbing the news, appalled. Not cruelly, not unkindly; they were appalled the way people are appalled on your behalf when they love you and have spent years regarding the other party as, to put it charitably, a menace.

Kaiba? The Kaiba? Are you sure you're okay? Did he pressure you? Was he weird about it? (He was always weird about everything, literally everything, so how could he answer?)

Yugi fielded the barrage as best he could, insisting yes, he was fine, yes he wanted to, no it wasn't like that, even as some private part of him snagged hard on that last question and refused to let go.

He hesitated, but he knew he could not tell them about the part where Kaiba had pinned his wrists and said, in a voice with no performance left in it, that he would ruin anyone who ever touched him. He did not tell them about you're mine delivered as a clause in a contract, or about the calm, conversational way Kaiba had restated it afterward, as not a threat but a promise he planned to keep. He certainly did not tell them how thoroughly his own body had betrayed him at every one of those moments, how the fear and the wanting had been so completely braided together that he still couldn't pick them apart this morning.

He thought about it. He held the words right behind his teeth for a full ten seconds while Honda speculated loudly in a voice message about whether Kaiba even owned a personality. 'Hey, so, one weird thing.' He could start, get their opinions, help him to rationalize his own irrational thoughts. It would be so easy. They would know what to do

with it. That was what they were for.

And then he swallowed it, and typed, “He was actually kind of sweet about it, honestly,” and listened to the coos and gags in equal measure, and hated, in a small clear corner of himself, how smoothly the lie had come out. He knew that not saying it was the unhealthy choice. He just couldn’t make his mouth (or thumbs) do the other.

He told himself he’d bring it up later. He was already pretty sure he wouldn’t. He hung up with Anzu shortly after, and tried to act normal for the rest of the morning.

Jounouchi came by that afternoon, because Jou had apparently decided that a phone call was insufficient and that this development required an in-person meeting. Yugi didn't mind the company.

“I needed to see your face,” Jou announced, already halfway up the stairs to Yugi’s room with the ease of a friend who’d been climbing them since they were fifteen.

“I need to confirm with my own eyes that you’re not, like, brainwashed. You look brainwashed. Are you feeling okay?” He flopped backward onto Yugi’s bed, the same bed without changed sheets, a fact Yugi chose not to share. “Okay walk me through this, because I have so many questions and most of them are upsetting.” Yugi sighed, but couldn't help but smile. Jounouchi and Kaiba had a long, tumultuous history. He was taking this news with much more grace than expected.

Yugi sat in his desk chair and let himself be debriefed. He felt a warmth over his whole brain- when was the last time he was even able to just sit and hang with his friends? He had missed it all; a friend sprawed out in his room, the afternoon light going gold through the blinds, the particular safety of being teased by someone who’d known you forever. He laughed at Jounouchi. Jou laughed at him. For about twenty minutes he forgot to be anxious about anything at all.

He thought nothing of it when he heard the bell downstairs.

He thought significantly more of it when his bedroom door opened without a knock and Seto Kaiba was standing in it.

“Kaiba,” Yugi started, brightening on reflex, “I didn’t know you were stopping by.” The innocence in his voice could be read by everyone in the room, but it fell on deaf ears.

Kaiba's eyes had already gone from Yugi to the bed, to Jou lounging on it, to the rumpled sheets and the easy familiarity of it, and something behind that face shut like a vault. Yugi watched it happen and didn't understand it fast enough.

Jou had just enough time to sit up and say, "Oh, hey, it's-" before Kaiba crossed the room and hit him.

It was one short, brutal, economical punch. This was certainly not the first time the two had laid hands on each other, but unexpected nevertheless. Jou went sideways off the bed with a yelp, hand flying to his jaw. Yugi was on his feet without remembering standing, his voice climbing somewhere high and useless.

"Kaiba! Stop, why would you do that?" Yugi stood between them, and recognized in the back of his mind that this was only one of many times he has had to intervene between these two. He did not even bother to wrack his brain for a reason why; there had always been some banal reason that Kaiba and Jounouchi had gone after one another. He had silently hoped they had grown out of it. But even this was over the top for Kaiba.

"Get the fuck out, mutt," Kaiba said. He had not even bothered to acknowledge Yugi. He was looking at Jou with an expression so flat and so total that Jou, who had never in his life backed down from anything, especially pertaining to Kaiba, didn't know what to say for a brief moment.

Jou stood up, bristling, Yugi between them with both hands out, Jou snarling out a fuck you moneybags, you never change, Yugi half-pleading for him to just go, I'll call you, I'm so sorry, please. And Jou went, finally, not because he was afraid but because Yugi asked him to with a look that softened him more than Kaiba pissed him off, and for the years of maturity that has grown between their last spat. Yugi couldn't help but feel a small wave of Déjà vu.

Yugi turned around slowly. "What is wrong with you," he breathed, and it wasn't a real question, at least not one he expected an answer to.
Kaiba was very calm now, which was infinitely worse than if he'd been shouting. "How long has that mutt been here?"

"Why does that matter? You know Jounouchi is my best friend. Of course he's going to come over."

"Why was that dog laying on your bed." Flat, but so reminiscent of

their childhood that Yugi almost felt transported back for a moment. Maybe people did not change that much, after all.

“He sat on my.. Seto, he’s my friend, nothing happened, nothing has ever-” Yugi found himself stumbling over his words. Kaiba could not possibly be jealous of Jounouchi, of all people? They had all grown up together, that was insane! He knew Kaiba had always taken out the worst of his personality on Jounouchi, but he had not seen this attitude towards him since they were in high school.

Yugi’s phone buzzed in his hand, Jou’s name lighting up the screen, and Kaiba’s eyes dropped to it. He held out his palm. Yugi shook his head, knowing that Jounouchi was probably cursing Kaiba out right now in colorful language only he could pull off. So Kaiba simply took it, and Yugi found himself too stunned to pull back. While holding Yugi’s gaze, he flexed his hand once to pull the phone out of his grasp and smashed the phone to the ground. He learned down to pick up the now black screened phone on the desk with a gentleness that did not match anything else about the moment.

“I told you,” he said quietly. “I told you I don’t share.”

“Nothing happened,” Yugi said exasperated, and now that baseline of anxiety was starting to work its way up his spine, prickling cold up the back of his neck, because this was not the man who had been so careful with him the night before, or it was, and that was the unbearable part. “Seto, I swear to you, I would never. Jounouchi is not interested in men, especially not me. I wouldn’t.” Yugi stumbled over his words, utterly confused at how any of this moment could be misinterpreted.

Kaiba’s hand came up and settled around the front of Yugi’s throat. Not necessarily malicious, he applied minimal pressure, Yugi told himself, and he walked Yugi backward the two steps to the bed and pressed him down into it. Yugi went, breath stuttering, both hands coming up to grip Kaiba’s wrist, but he did not attempt to grab it away. He hated that underneath his confusion was that same traitorous heat from the night before already kindling in his gut.

He hung there over him, searching his face with that terrible focus, and Yugi watched something behind his eyes drag itself back from wherever it had gone. His thumb moved, slow, along the line of Yugi’s jaw.

“I believe you,” Kaiba said, low. The hand at Yugi’s throat eased, no

longer holding him down so much as simply resting there, possessive and warm.

“Look at you. You’re shaking.” It wasn’t mockery. Yugi registered that yes, at some point he had started to tremble. Did he even feel afraid anymore, after all he had been through since he was a kid? He couldn’t distinguish it from all the other blur of emotions coursing through his veins. It was something closer to wonder, and closer than that to hunger. “Tell me to leave and I’ll leave.”

Yugi didn’t.

That was the whole truth of it, the truth he’d have to sit with later in the dark. He had the out, and instead he turned his face into Kaiba’s palm and said, unsteady, “please don’t leave.”

Kaiba kissed him then, hard, and Yugi’s whole body lit up and protested in the same instant; the moment Kaiba’s weight pressed him properly into the mattress, the soreness from the night before announced itself in no uncertain terms. Yugi made a small, broken sound into his mouth that was half want and half ow, and Kaiba caught it and pulled back an inch.

“You’re still sore,” he murmured. Not a question. His hand smoothed down Yugi’s side, “From last night. We don’t have to.”

“I know,” Yugi exhaled a shaky breath. He knew he was sore, knew this was a terrible idea, knew his grandfather was awake and working directly below them and that the floor of his bedroom was the ceiling of the shop. Every reasonable part of him was lined up with its hand raised. And he reached up anyway and pulled Kaiba back down by the collar. “I know. Just.. we need to keep it down is all..” not the complete truth, but not a lie.

That seemed to do something to Kaiba; the sheer reckless want of it. His eyes went dark. “Then you’ll have to be quiet too,” he said against Yugi’s jaw, and there was a thread of cruelty in it that was also, somehow, tender. “Can you manage that?”

Yugi very much could not, as it turned out, and Kaiba seemed to take it as a personal challenge to push him to his limits.

Kaiba came better prepared this time- just in case, and although he had planned for a much different set of events, quickly recalibrated his plans realizing they had much less time than he had hoped.

Kaiba worked quickly to pull Yugi's shirt off, pressing his lips against his neck and nipping at his tender flesh as he worked his own jeans down. At first in deference to how tender Yugi still was, he pulled out a small package of lube and generously emptied its contents directly against his hole, working him open again with a patience that contradicted the fury he'd walked in with, murmuring low reminders to breathe.

It was painful in the way that he felt raw from the night before, but the lube significantly reduced the hurt and cut their preparation time in third. The ache and the pleasure tangled together until Yugi found that he was biting in Kaiba's shoulder and bicep to keep himself from crying out every time Kaiba would thrust his fingers up inside him, brushing against the bundle of nerves that turned his vision white.

Keeping quiet was torment. Every time a moan built in his chest, Kaiba would press a palm gently over his mouth, or catch the sound in a kiss, or breathe shh against his ear in a way that absolutely did not help, that made the heat coil tighter, that made Yugi clutch at his shoulders and bite down on the meat of his own hand to keep from crying out.

The bed had a creak he'd never once noticed in twenty years of sleeping in it and was now agonizingly aware of; Kaiba adjusted for it without breaking rhythm.

"Don't let me catch you in bed with a dog again." He whispered, no malice left in his voice. Yugi wanted to protest; that was NOT what happened. Kaiba didn't give him time to respond, catching his mouth with his and slamming into him hard as emphasis. Yugi cried out with pleasure into him, knowing very well that if there was customers in the shop at the time, they probably heard.

Kaiba felt himself getting closer, and like the night before, he pinned Yugi's wrist above his head and positioned himself to be staring in his eyes.

"Say you're fucking mine." He whispered, the curse like a lullaby on his tongue as he buried himself deep inside his lover. It put Yugi closer to the edge.

"I'm yours, I- I promise." He stuttered out in a whisper, bracing himself as Kaiba worked to reposition his bottom half to get himself as deep as possible.

"Say you're fucking sorry." Kaiba thrust into him with more brute

force this time, and Yugi squeezed his eyes shut tightly.

“I'm sorry, it won’t happen again.” Over the timidness of his own voice, for a moment he could hear Kaiba’s own moan, satisfied.

He didn’t have the language for why he was doing this against every scrap of his own better judgment. He only knew that being held down and claimed and wanted without limit filled some hollow place he hadn’t let himself acknowledge was empty, and that he would apparently pay almost anything to keep it filled.

When he came it was with Kaiba’s hand clamped over his mouth and his own teeth in his lip, shaking apart silently, soundless and wrecked. Kaiba followed close behind, burying his face in Yugi’s neck and going rigid and quiet in that frustrating way of his, holding Yugi so tightly it nearly hurt, which by that point was indistinguishable from everything else.

And then, Kaiba didn't get up to leave.

This was perhaps the most disorienting part of the entire afternoon. Yugi had expected Kaiba to make up an excuse to leave afterwards, it just seemed in character with him. Instead he found that he gathered him up, sore and wrung-out, and arranged the both of them under the displaced sheets with a care that bordered on tenderness, tucking Yugi against his chest, smoothing a hand down his spine in long slow passes.

He pressed a kiss to the crown of Yugi’s head. He checked, in a murmur, whether Yugi was hurt, whether he needed water, whether he needed space. Yugi could only answer by cuddling up tighter to him.

Yugi lay there with his ear against Kaiba’s slowing heartbeat and felt profoundly, helplessly confused. He had been upset, and should be more upset, that Kaiba had come in and assaulted their long time friend. He was, instead, being held more gently than he could ever imagined.

He didn’t say any of it. He just let himself be held, and hated how much he wanted to stay there, and filed the rest away with everything else he wasn’t ready to look at.

Grandpa Mutou caught him on the stairs that evening, after Seto had finally gone home to have dinner with Mokuba.

“That’s been lot of Kaiba lately,” his grandfather observed, mild as anything, not looking up from the inventory clipboard in his hands. It really wasn’t- two days in a row was not necessarily a lot. There was also plenty of reason for his grandfather to be apprehensive about him showing up, considering the history. He let it sit there, with all the wisdom of a man who had seen a great many things in his long life and chosen carefully which ones to comment on.

“He’s, um.” Yugi’s mouth went dry. “We’ve been hanging out more. Catching up.”

“Mm,” said Grandpa, and turned a page, and that was all. But Yugi knew that sound. He had been raised on that exact sound. It was the sound of a man who knew exactly what was happening under his roof and was waiting, with infinite and slightly heartbroken patience, for his grandson to feel safe enough to say it.

Yugi stood there with the words right behind his teeth again; and again couldn’t get a single one of them past. He just nodded, and went up, and felt like a coward in the specific, suffocating way you only feel when someone has left the door open and you’ve chosen to build a wall instead.

His broken phone was still sitting dead on his desk when he swore that he heard it go off.

Except it didn’t, because it was broken. It took Yugi a second to understand that the buzzing was coming from somewhere else. He looked into the corner of his room and realized it was a notification on the small backup tablet he barely used from his banking app.

Confused, he opened it. He read the number. He read it again, certain he’d miscounted the zeros, and then sat down hard on the edge of the bed because he had not miscounted the zeros.

A new message arrived a moment later, from Kaiba, on a social media app Yugi didn’t even remember them being connected on.

For a new phone.

Yugi stared at it. The figure on his banking app was enough to buy approximately forty phones, or a reliable used car, or several months of not working in his grandfather’s shop. His hands had gone a little numb.

Seto I can’t take this, he typed, fumbling on the unfamiliar tablet

keyboard. At least the fancy autocorrect made him type proper. *This is WAY too much. It's like a hundred times what a phone costs. I can't.*

The reply came fast, and entirely characteristic.

I broke it. I replace it.

Not with a DOWN PAYMENT ON A HOUSE you don't!!

I don't have time to take you shopping. Get whatever you want. The excess is so I don't have to think about it again. A pause, the typing indicator appearing and vanishing twice, and then: *And so I know you have a way to reach me. Use it.*

Yugi sat with the tablet in his lap and the obscene number glowing up at him and understood, dimly, that refusing it was not really an option Kaiba had left on the table. He could give it back. He knew he could give it back. He was also fairly sure he wasn't going to, and he didn't entirely understand why, and that not understanding was becoming the most consistent feeling of his entire week.

Getting a new phone meant getting a new number, because the old SIM had not survived its encounter with Kaiba's bitch fit any better than the screen had. Which meant, later that evening after a run to the store, sending a fresh round of messages to the group chat from an unknown number, opening with the deeply suspicious hey it's yugi, my phone broke, new number.

The replies were instant and, in Jounouchi's case, immediate in their accusation.

broke how, Jou wrote, and then, before Yugi could even answer, *did HE do that? yugi did kaiba break your phone?*

Yugi looked at the message for a long time.
no lol. dropped it in the sink like an idiot. you know me.

…you sure

positive. how's your face btw, i'm so sorry about that, he completely overreacted

And it worked, not because Jou believed him for a second, but because Jou loved him and wanted to believe him. The conversation slid off toward Jou's bruised jaw and Jou's wounded pride and Jou's extremely loud opinions about Kaiba's character, none of which Yugi

defended and all of which he privately, traitorously, did not fully share. He had, rightfully so, bitched up a storm after the incident to the group, but all of the inquiries from his friends had gone unanswered.

He sat there typing yeah and i know and you're right and felt the guilt settle over him like a second skin, close and warm and impossible to take off.

He was building something with Kaiba. He could feel it taking shape, sturdy and strange. He just wasn't sure yet whether he was building it, or whether it was building around him, wall by careful wall, while he handed over the bricks himself and thanked him for them.

He set the new phone down. It buzzed almost at once; *Goodnight.* Against all logical, it erased the tension and uncertainty he had been feeling moments before.

Yugi smiled at it before he could stop himself, and then sat very still in the dark, alone with the fact that he had.

Chapter 3: backseat of my bmw

Chapter Summary

> Yugi learns that some parts of history always tend to repeat themselves, but he's never let that stop him.

Chapter Notes

> Im rereading the manga for the first time in many years and seeing Yugi run up to Kaiba so excited to see him out of his coma after literally their last encounter was when he created an elaborate scheme to murder him and his friends 👁️👄👁️ I love it lol but I had to rewrite this like 6 times because nothing felt right

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The text had come that morning, and Yugi had read it approximately forty times since.

Dinner. Tonight. You'll be picked up at seven. Then, a beat later, as though Kaiba had reconsidered the optics of issuing a summons: *If you're free.* The afterthought was so transparently an afterthought that Yugi had laughed out loud at his register, and then spent the rest of the day in a low simmer of anticipation. He had forgiven himself at this point for acting so lovestruck. He enjoyed it.

He was not picked up by a driver. To his surprise, the black car that pulled up to the shop had Seto himself behind the wheel, one wrist draped over the top of it, looking at Yugi through the open window with an expression that wasn't quite a smile but was doing the work of one.

"Get in," he said. "You're letting the cold out."

Yugi got in, and wondered how many times he had ever seen Kaiba drive. Approximately zero, he landed on. In fact, it had never quite registered that Kaiba could drive. The man had spent their entire adolescence arriving by helicopter, by blimp, by whatever absurd machine best announced his wealth and collected aura points. Something about him doing something this ordinary felt extraordinarily intimate.

They were silent for a few moments as they drove, and Yugi made the

fatal error of looking over.

It should not have been allowed, he decided, for someone to look like that doing something as mundane as driving. Seto drove the way he did everything; powerful, unbothered command, one hand loose on the wheel and the other resting on the gearshift. His profile was lit in passing slices of streetlight, lashes throwing shadows down his cheek every time they passed under a lamp.

He'd rolled his sleeves to the elbow. Yugi had not previously considered forearms to be a thing he had opinions about, and now found he had several. The tendons shifted when Seto turned the wheel. Yugi swallowed hard. He was, had always been, stupidly gorgeous. It was ridiculous how every part of Kaiba, new or old or mundane, had this impractical impact on him. Yugi had spent a frankly humiliating percentage of the past three weeks thinking about it.

"Hey," Yugi started, looking down at his own knees. "Can I ask you something? And you don't have to answer right away. We don't have to have a whole thing about it."

"That's an alarming way to open."

He took a breath. "What is this? Us. I'm not trying to put a label on it if you don't want one. I just don't really know how to think about it, and I keep not knowing, and it's kind of making me crazy." It came out faster and smaller than he'd planned, and he stared resolutely at the dashboard, cheeks hot.

Kaiba was quiet for a moment. Yugi risked a glance and found his face had gone very still, the way it did before he made a move he'd already finished calculating three turns ago.

"You want to know what we are," Kaiba repeated, no real hint of any emotion in his voice.

"Y-yeah." He stumbled, unsure how to interpret the flatness. "What am I to you?"

Kaiba huffed- he almost sounded offended.

The car drifted right.
It was completely casual, borderline psychotic, how Seto's hand barely moved on the wheel as he eased the car across the center line and into the oncoming lane, into the path of headlights that went from distant

to enormous in the space of a held breath. A horn blared up somewhere ahead of them. Seto's voice underneath it was perfectly level. Perfectly calm. Almost gentle.

"If you ever try to leave," he said, watching the road, "I'll kill us both. I want you to understand that's not a threat. There isn't a version of this where you walk away from me and I keep living politely without you." His voice was even, and he spared the briefest glance at Yugi.

"There are no exits from me, Yugi. There is only a ledge."

And Yugi, watching the headlights swell, had the strangest sensation of having seen this exact thing before. Because he had; in a dark way it was like recognizing an old song. Kaiba had an awful habit of using both his and Yugi's life as leverage over the years, he couldn't find it in himself to react.

The headlights filled the windshield. Yugi could see the other driver's face. He waited for the panic. He waited for any feeling at all. His fight-or-flight had been burnt clean out of him at a young age, after everything he had seen and done, the surreal and mortal horrors they had experienced, and he was not even sure it could register a moment like this anymore. He, or rather, his long term counterpart, had conditioned himself not to flinch in the face of danger. He felt no adrenaline. No fear. Just nothing.

Seto swerved back at the last second, just as calmly.

Back into their own lane, the other car screaming past with its horn still blaring, the whole event folding shut behind them as if it had never opened. Kaiba resettled his hand on the gearshift. He did not look over. The car ate the road at a perfectly legal speed, and the summer evening stretched on outside the window as if nothing had changed.

Yugi sat very still and waited to feel something.

He should be screaming. He knew that, in the flat detached way you know facts about strangers. He should be demanding to be let out. He should be shaking, his heart should be trying to climb out of his throat. Instead there was a great expanse of nothing where all of that should have been.

How strange, he thought, that the most mundane moments in my life can eat me alive with anxiety; making phone calls to strangers, an unexpected knock at the door, a restaurant order on the spot. But

facing death again, he found he couldn't feel a thing. A small part of him argued that he was, for what it was worth, historically always safe in Kaiba's hands… once they got past the several times he had made attempts on his life as children.

And at this point in his life, sitting alone in his safe quiet world felt worse than sitting in the middle of his worst days with his friends beside him, if he was being honest with himself. The calm made him want to crawl out of his skin sometimes. This, the swerve, the held breath, the shared brush with the edge; this almost felt like home in a sick sense. He shelved the thought before it could finish forming. It was not a thought a sane person had.

"Okay," Yugi heard himself say, from somewhere slightly above and to the left of his own body. Some small part of him registered that his question still had not been answered. Now was not the best time to point that out.

"I'm not going anywhere." Yugi tried to be reassuring and stumbled on the words. In all the years they'd known each other, through every impossible thing, Yugi had never once turned away from him or given up on him. It felt like a b-movie plot twist that he was being asked to prove it now.

"I know," Kaiba said, and something in his shoulders eased as if he really didn't. He reached over without looking and laced his fingers through Yugi's where they lay limp in his lap. He pulled their joined hands up and pressed a gentle kiss to Yugi's knuckles, then settled them back down, his thumb stroking idle little arcs across the skin like he was soothing him. Like he was the safe thing in the car. "I know you wouldn't."

Yugi looked down at their joined hands, and back at Kaiba. There was the faintest hint of a satisfied smirk on his face. This, Yugi realized, was his way of being romantic. Maybe it was more of an answer than he'd thought.

Mokuba lit up when Yugi walked in, immediately launching into a campaign to recruit him for some co-op game with a complexity that rivaled tax law. The dining room felt the size of Yugi's entire block, and he kept catching his own reflection in dark windows, unsure of what he was searching for. Staring back was only a guy in his nicest shirt laughing at a fifteen-year olds jokes.

"He's funnier than you," Mokuba informed his brother, jabbing a fork

in Yugi's direction; as Mokuba had grown into his teen years, as many younger brothers did, he enjoyed trying to get under his brothers skin. "Way funnier. How are you funnier than Seto, that's such a low bar, but still."

"It's a gift," Yugi said, and the joke came out fine, came out warm even, and underneath it he was thinking *I almost died ninety minutes ago and I let him hold my hand about it. Fuck.*

He watched Seto across the table. The way he softened, fractionally, every time Mokuba landed a hit. The private language between the two brothers. The bottomless love there. It would have been so much easier, Yugi thought, if Seto were simply a psychopath. Maybe he was. He knew that was what his friends believed, after all the years of emotional tug-of-war. Their laundry list of reasons to back up their argument was long, valid and unhinged.

But there was nuance, he argued against himself. They had both done unforgivable things to each other before either of them was old enough to drive. A swerving car, weighed against all that Seto had been through at the expense of Yugi, almost felt like old friends sharing an inside joke. He didn't have the moral high ground here. He'd never had it.

Yugi had seen the cracks under Seto's cold facade years ago. It was what had kept him chasing after him all this time, trying to corral him into doing the right thing time and time again. And at the end of the day, Kaiba had come through for him and his friends more times than he could count. Yugi could not make that person his friends saw and the man across from him in the dining room seat resolve into a single image, no matter how he turned them. They just hovered there, double-exposed, refusing to be one thing.

He smiled at Mokuba and passed the water and waited for himself to come back to the present.

After dinner Mokuba was banished to his room to wash up for bed, and somehow Yugi ended up in Seto's bedroom. As expected, it was huge. Beautiful, and practically devoid of life. The one personal touch was a single framed photo of two small boys he wasn't sure he was supposed to see.

He didn't get to look at it long, because Seto's mouth was on his neck. When Seto kissed him, the numbness finally cracked, just enough for warmth to come flooding up through the gap. Yugi made a small

grateful sound and pressed into it, fisting his hands in that expensive shirt, letting himself be walked backward toward the enormous bed. Seto's hands found the hem of his shirt while Yugi's found Seto's belt, fumbling, while Seto sucked at the soft patch of skin where shoulder met neck and ran his hands over his ribcage.

"You look perfect," Seto whispered against his neck, in no hurry to undress him tonight. He wanted the chance to finally take his time, to unravel him, to leave him wrecked and begging before they were halfway through. Yugi preened internally. He had learned over the past few weeks that the compliments fell easily when he behaved well. He didn't take the time to follow up on the thought, on whether all relationships felt this conditional.

Midway through Seto slowly removing Yugi's shirt, they both heard the door open. He froze, but, as Yugi noted in the back of his mind, did not make a show of pushing him away. He held him there and looked at the door with an annoyance that could only be mustered by an older brother who'd grown up with a younger, constantly meddling sibling.

"Hey, Seto, do you know where the- OH. Oh my god. Oh my god. I didn't- BYE." Mokuba's face went through approximately eleven expressions in two seconds and then vanished, the door slamming, the grumbling of a disgusted younger brother carrying down the hall.

Yugi dropped his forehead against Seto's collarbone and gave a small laugh, helpless and suddenly shy. After a moment, he felt Seto exhale something that might generously have been called a laugh too. Yugi recognized, for that moment, that everything felt easy. Normal. Good.

"I'll take you home," Seto said into his hair, with the resignation of a man whose evening had been comprehensively cockblocked by a teenager. "Before he really requires therapy."

They made it about six minutes down the road.

Yugi wasn't even sure who started it. He'd been watching the forearms again, the play of light on his gorgeous face, the way Seto's hand wrapped the gearshift, and he'd put his own hand on Seto's thigh feel the muscle move under it. Kaiba had glanced over with a look that could've started a fire.

Somewhere in there the longing flipped into need.

"Pull over."

“Yugi.” Kaiba tried to sound stern, chastising even, but his voice had no resolve.

“Pull over.”

He pulled over.

Kaiba killed the lights and they fell into the back seat together in a tangle of limbs, Yugi half-laughing, half-frantic, climbing over the center console with absolutely no grace. The back of the car was leather and shadow and the faint blue glow of the dash through the partition. Seto sat back against the door and pulled Yugi over him, hands closing hard around his hips, and Yugi went, straddling his lap, feeling how hard Seto already was through his jeans. His own cock throbbed painfully against the denim.

“Like this?” Yugi breathed, searching for reassurance.

“Like this,” Seto confirmed, low, hands sliding up under his shirt and dragging it off over his head. “You wanted to know what we are.” The statement almost felt like dragging up an old wound, one that should have felt fresh. Yugi buried it with his lust. Kaiba’s mouth found his chest, his throat, the fresh ghost of the old mark. “You feel like everything to me.” Yugi shuddered at what felt like a confession.

Yugi wasted no time wrangling himself free from his jeans. Seto ripped open a small foil packet of lube with his teeth (was he planning this, Yugi thought briefly) and generously coated his fingers, then reached underneath him and worked Yugi open like he wanted to memorize every ridge of muscle inside his lover. Patient even now, watching Yugi’s face the entire time in the dashboard glow as Yugi rocked down onto his hand. Even with practice he still found himself a little sore, but the ache and the stretch and the want all swirled together into something Yugi was beginning to crave.

“Please,” Yugi gasped, when fingers stopped being enough. “Seto, please-” His voice was strangled with need.

“Anything you want,” Seto guided him by the hips, lined himself up, and let Yugi sink down onto him slow. Both of them shuddered at it, Yugi’s breath punching out of him in a thin sound as he took every inch on the way down, until he was fully seated, trembling in Seto’s lap with his hands braced on those broad shoulders.

For a moment neither moved. Yugi felt overwhelmed by how full he was from this angle. Seto’s hands stroked up and down his sides; he

thought Yugi looked rather ethereal like this. “Look at you,” he murmured, trying hard to keep his own voice steady, the control fraying at the edges. “Took all of me the first try. What a good boy.” He purred. For the first time, he truly did not sound steady or put together. The praise shot through Yugi like fire in his veins. “Move.”

It was clumsy at first, finding the rhythm, Yugi’s thighs burning with the unfamiliar work of it. But Seto’s hands were there guiding his hips, showing him, and then Yugi found the angle that made him see stars. He rode him in earnest, chasing his own pleasure, the obscene sound of sex filling the small dark space. Yugi was vaguely aware of the car rocking gently on its springs, the windows fogging around him. But mostly, in this moment, he felt like the world revolved around Kaiba.

Seto let him work for it, watching him with hooded eyes and an expression of devastating focus, his jaw tight, his hands the only thing keeping Yugi from flying apart. “You look fucking beautiful,” he gasped, and then he started to thrust up to meet him. Yugi nearly sobbed.

“Seto- fuck,” It came out strangled. Yugi’s head dropped forward, his hair falling in his eyes, every thrust driving the breath out of him. He was close, embarrassingly close, the heat coiling tight and bright at the base of his spine, and he didn’t want it to end. He wanted to live here in this exact unbearable moment forever. All hesitations and reservations from earlier in the night were out the window, in a way only a hormonal twenty-year-old could talk himself into.

“You want to come for me,” Seto said. It wasn’t a question. One hand left Yugi’s hip and wrapped around his cock, using the precum he’d already spent to stroke him in time, and Yugi cried out and clenched around him. He felt Seto’s whole body jerk in response. He loved having some semblance of control. Some sign that he could unravel Seto, even a little, too.

“Please,” Yugi begged, past pride, past shame, riding him desperate and undone. He couldn’t find the words.

“Then come for me.” A growl. A demand, as Kaiba tightened his grip and slammed up into him with reckless abandon.

And Yugi did, the orgasm tearing through him so hard his vision whited out, spilling over Seto’s fist, his whole body locking around him. At the very crest of it, Yugi let his hormones and his emotions override the logical part of his brain.

“I love you,” Yugi gasped. “I love you, I love you, fuck.” The words fell out of his mouth before he could stop them, and if they hadn’t been true, he’d have been horrified.

Seto came to the admission, silent as ever, gripping Yugi’s hips hard enough to bruise, holding him down and buried deep, riding it out with his face pressed into Yugi’s shoulder and his breath ragged against his skin. Yugi could feel him throb as he spilled deep inside him.

For a long moment afterward there was only the sound of both of them breathing, the tick of the cooling engine, the fog on the windows.
Yugi felt a little dumb as the gravity of his confession settled over him. Kaiba kissed his neck gently, a small acknowledgment of what Yugi had said.

“Good.”

That was all. Good. Like Yugi had landed a difficult play. Like he’d confirmed a figure on a report. Did he really expect a more romantic response? He couldn’t even imagine hearing Kaiba express love for another human being. He should be more hurt, he surmised, but found instead that he was grateful not to have been rejected.

Kaiba smoothed a hand up Yugi’s back, pressed a kiss to his temple, and said nothing else. Gave nothing back. Took the words and folded them into his pocket with all the other things he’d decided belonged to him now.

Yugi told himself it was enough.

Kaiba parked and walked him to his door. To Yugi’s disbelief, he kissed him there, out in the open of the street, deep and unhurried, one hand cradling the back of Yugi’s skull like something he treasured. It left Yugi momentarily dazed. And then he was gone, taillights shrinking down the empty street.

Seto drove the rest of the way home in silence.

He had spent years trying to take something from Yugi Mutou from the moment they met. The BEWD, that one beautiful card he’d torn from an old man’s hand and changed the trajectory of his life. Then the title. Then the Pharaoh’s measure, over and over, across every tournament he could build and every duel he could engineer. He had never managed it. Not once. Yugi was the single acquisition that had

refused, his entire life, to be acquired. The one mind that had beaten him. The one force that had ever reached past every wall Seto owned and unmade him, left him staring at nothing for months while his own psyche reassembled itself in the dark. A man does not forget the only thing that ever proved it could destroy him. He either runs from it forever or he never lets it out of arm's reach.

And then things has changed. Suddenly, Yugi has become softer, smaller. Obtainable, really. Seto had told himself the longing was new. It wasn't. It was the very foundation they stood on. The obsession hadn't ended when the Pharaoh left, but grew stronger, something akin to a stalking lion who knew his prey was finally letting down it's defenses.
This time Seto had already decided that this one was not going to be taken from him too. Whatever it cost. Whatever he had to become.

The moment Kaiba was out of sight, something shifted inside of him. Yugi let himself in.

His grandfather was still up, reading in the front room, and he looked up when Yugi came in and his face immediately dropped.

"Yugi." He set the book down. "You're white as a sheet. What happened?"

Yugi looked down at his own hands. They were, he recognized, now shaking. He had no idea when that had started. The numbness that had carried him all night chose that exact moment to finally, catastrophically break. It came up all at once; the headlights, the calm voice, the cliff, the great smooth nothing where his fear should have been. All of it arriving hours late and demanding to be felt at the same time. His knees felt unreliable. He gripped the doorframe.

"I'm okay," he said, which was such a transparent lie that his grandfather just looked at him, undisguised worry written all over his face.
And there was something else in the old man's expression too, Yugi thought; something older and more tired. Because Solomon had history with Kaiba as well. He, of anyone, knew exactly what that family was capable of when it decided it wanted something. He did not say any of this. He didn't have to. It was all there in the way he looked at his grandson going pale in the doorway.

"I'm okay, Grandpa. I'm just tired. It's been a long night."

"Yugi," he tried, but Yugi was barely keeping himself together.

“I’m okay. I promise. I’m gonna go to bed.” And he went, fast, up the stairs before the old man could see his face crumple. He understood with terrible clarity as he climbed that the events of the night had simply been waiting for a safe place to land, and that his grandfather’s worried face was the first safe thing he’d touched all evening.

He lay in the dark with his heart finally, belatedly hammering, and opened the group chat, because he didn’t know what else to do with the size of what was in him. He knew what he really wanted to talk about, but couldn’t bring himself to do it. Yugi reasoned, in a protective sort of way, that his friends were better off not knowing the details. They had survived enough of Kaiba to last a lifetime.

They didn’t need to be dragged back in.

i told kaiba i loved him, he typed, and sent it before he could chicken out.
The responses came fast even at that hour.
YOU WHAT
yugi
yugi it’s been like THREE WEEKS
what did HE say
Yugi stared at the last one. He thought about lying. He was so tired of lying.
he said “good,” Yugi typed.
The chat went quiet for a moment, the specific quiet of several people typing and deleting at once.
good??? that’s it?? he said GOOD??? that fucking prick — Jou.
okay i’m sorry but that’s insane, — Anzu. *babe that’s not a normal thing to say back to someone.*
are you ok? like genuinely. don’t answer fast, — Honda, which from Honda was practically a thesis.
did I miss something?? like Seto Kaiba??
Thanks Bakura, Yugi thought, for your monthly addition to the group conversation. He’d catch him up eventually. He knew he probably would not look at the chat again for another month.

They were unimpressed. Not cruel, but unimpressed in the clear-eyed way of people standing far enough back to see the whole picture, even if it was biased in Yugi’s favor. Yugi lay there reading their concern and felt it bounce off of him like rain off glass.

He knew they were right. Some sober, sensible part of him knew he was in over his head. That the man he’d just told he loved had, three hours ago, aimed a car at oncoming traffic to make a point. Threatens

to kill himself to make points. Kidnaps his loved ones to make points. That a healthy person in a healthy relationship would recognize some history is prone to repeat itself. This was the same current it had always been, finding a new channel. Kaiba had simply discovered that love was another kind of duel, another impossible thing to win, another way to finally take the one prize that had spent a lifetime refusing him. And Yugi, God help him, had always shown up.

He could not, for the life of him, make the knowing change anything. He felt like a man describing his own house fire from inside the house, calmly, declining to leave, because the warmth was comfortable.

Yugi tried to put together a convincing sentence; he typed, and then deleted it, and typed *i don't really know how to explain it,* and deleted that too, and finally settled on *he's not good at that stuff. it's fine.* And hated every word of it. Hated that he was doing it to them again, building the same wall brick by brick and handing the trowel back with a smile. They loved him. They'd shown up for him for years. Hell, they'd survived Kaiba's worst right alongside him. Would any of this even surprise them? They might even be surprised at how gentle he has been up to this point.

Yugi sighed, recognizing that while his thoughts were still rapid and all over the place, the buzz of anxiety in his body was slowly dying down as he grounded himself in his room. He recognized that somewhere under all of it lived the small, ugly fear that if he told them everything they'd make him choose, and he already knew, sick to his stomach, which way he'd choose.

He put the phone face-down. He did not sleep well.

Chapter End Notes

> It haunted me for weeks that i wrote they drove into the left lane instead of the right until i changed it, lol

Chapter 4: you know I fuck up sometimes

Chapter Summary

Yugi moves in, whether he likes it or not.

Chapter Notes

This started as a one shot, I'm not sure how I got 4 chapters in. I think I'll have one or two more. Thanks for reading ❤

The nights had become a habit before either of them admitted it was one. It started small. A dinner that ran late, a duel that ran later, and then Seto saying *it's pointless to drive you back* in a tone that brooked no argument. Yugi had stayed. He'd stayed the next week too, and the week after, and somewhere in there the staying stopped needing a reason. Now there was a toothbrush in the bathroom that was his. There was a side of the enormous bed that was his. He hadn't decided on either. They had simply accreted, the way everything with Seto did; fact first, permission never.

He spent most nights there now. He told himself it was easier. The shop was quiet, his grandfather understanding to the point of heartbreak, and the truth was that Yugi slept better than he had in years. Not because it was peaceful. Because it wasn't. Some animal part of him relaxed in the presence of a threat he could see.

Tonight he'd spent most of the evening playing video games with Mokuba after his shift at the shop, until Mokuba picked up a promising-sounding video call from a young girl, and disappeared into his room for the night. Yugi sat back on the couch and half-considered going home to his own bed. He shook the thought away almost as soon as it arrived. He knew he wanted to wait for Kaiba to get home.

"Take off your clothes."

Yugi had barely heard him come in. He looked up to find Kaiba already through the living room door, shutting it loudly behind him, shrugging off his coat and getting undressed right there by the entryway.

"Well. Hi to you too," Yugi greeted warmly. Kaiba tended to come home from a long day sexually charged, good day or bad. Yugi briefly wondered which it had been. He wouldn't get much of an answer if he

asked now.

“Get on your hands and knees.”

Yugi peered up from under his lashes, a little startled, his attention pulled fully from the manga he’d been idly reading. A few months in and Seto still found ways to make him blush like it was their first time. He wanted to protest that he was still working on step one. Then he caught the fire in Kaiba’s eyes and decided he’d better work on catching up.

He started stripping out of his pajamas. He was barely out of his tank top before Kaiba decided it wasn’t fast enough. Seto all but ripped him out of his sweatpants, grabbed his face, and kissed him hard. Yugi gasped a moan into it before he found himself spun around, one arm wrenched up behind his back as Kaiba pushed him down into the couch.

“You have no idea what it does to me all day,” Kaiba growled into his ear, bare chest flush to Yugi’s back, already grinding against him. “Knowing you’re here. Waiting for me when I get home.”

“O-oh?” Yugi stuttered out, already growing hard quickly. “Will you tell me?” He tried his best to be seductive, but he found he was already on the edge of needy. Yugi swallowed hard, a moan escaping as Seto bit down into his shoulder. Hard.

“I'd rather show you instead.” He used his weight to press Yugi deeper into the cushions, pinning his free arm beneath him. The position was genuinely uncomfortable; Yugi shoved the thought to the back of his mind as the wave of heat rolled through his lower stomach, Seto rolling his hips against him, pressing his erection tight up against his ass.

Kaiba reached into the pile of clothes on the floor and came up with a small squeeze tube of lube.

Yugi’s heart did an odd little skip. Why does he carry that on him? He shook the flit of jealousy away as he felt Kaiba prod at his entrance with little preparation. Seto’s free hand fisted in his hair and pulled his head back, rough, at the same moment he pushed himself in. Yugi cried out, gritting his teeth to keep himself together.

Seto worked from a single slick, impatient stretch into setting a brutal pace, far rougher than their usual rhythm; drawing strangled, embarrassing sounds out of Yugi he couldn’t catch in time. Slowly the

hand pulling his head back left his hair and slid down to wrap around his throat.

Seto's grip tightened enough to thin the edges of the room, enough that the next breath came short and the one after barely came at all. Yugi's hand scrabbled at the cushion in a panicked reaction, but choosing to trust his lover knew what he was doing. Seto still towered over him in every way, anyway. Getting away would be futile. His next thought- he hadn't agreed to this- it shot a mixture of ice and heat through his veins. He couldn't have said no to it either; not only was it physically impossible, but he is not sure if he was completely opposed.

Then the grip eased, breath flooded back hot and dizzy, before Yugi felt one last strong, painful grip against his throat as Kaiba was coming with a low sound against the back of his neck, hips stuttering, buried deep inside of him. He released his throat completely, and Yugi found himself gasping for air and scrambling to move himself out from under Kaiba.

Seto cupped his chin to catch him; more grabbed it, really, and used this to turn Yugi around to face him. His eyes scanned over his face for just a moment before he kissed him hard, pushing Yugi back down into the couch. Yugi reached for words, for any words, a protest he couldn't find the shape of on his tongue, and fell into a shocked silence instead.

He slid down Yugi's body impatiently and began to kiss his chest, his stomach, and the touch had changed so much that Yugi thought he perhaps imagined the last 5 minutes. If he had not still been trying to catch his breath, he would have doubts that these two events occurred in the same timeline.

Kaiba spared one quick glance up at Yugi before he took his cock in his mouth, sloppy and unhurried, and Yugi threw his head back and tried to stop the trembling in his legs that he had not realized started. Seto worked his tongue and hot mouth over his entire length, taking him wholly like it was nothing, and Yugi couldn't help but begin to unravel, thoughts of the hand around his throat being pushed into the back of his mind.

Kaiba released his cock with a soft plop, kissed the inside of his lower thighs and unexpectedly dove down further, working him open with his tongue through a mess of lube and his own cum with a filthy thoroughness that had Yugi fisting the cushions and forgetting,

entirely, the marks already cooling on his throat. He came embarrassingly fast, shaking, with Seto's name caught somewhere behind his teeth. Seto caught the end of his orgasm in his mouth, giving a final suck that curled his toes with over sensitivity.

Seto leaned up and kissed him, decidedly softer then before, the taste of both of their spent orgasms and lube still on his tongue. Whatever had possessed him since he walked through the door was simmering down now. In moments he was collapsing against Yugi. Not only collapsing, Yugi thought, with a sudden helpless warmth, but snuggling into him. Yugi absently rubbed the sore spots around his throat, a few finger-shaped marks blooming that would be bruises by morning. He hadn't had a moment to think straight about what had just happened.

"Move in with me."

"What?" Yugi winced. He was only now noticing how raw his throat felt, the word scraping out of him. He rubbed his face, as if that would wipe away the disbelief, and found it wiped away tears he hadn't realized were on his face. All thoughts of approaching the previous subject had fallen to the wayside.

"Move in with me. Going back and forth is impractical."

The impact was so large Yugi felt clotheslined by it. And for once he sensed something else underneath the words. It wasn't only impractical. He wanted him to stay. Yugi's heart swelled in his chest even as he fumbled for a response. There was just something about Kaiba's ability to knock all his reservations out before Yugi had a chance to really dwell on them- or Yugi found any reason to not focus on them. He wasn't sure.

"Y-you don't think this is quick?" he offered, and grimaced at himself. What was quick about this? He felt stitched into Kaiba at every seam, irreversibly. "I'm not even your boyfriend."

"Of course you are." Kaiba said it matter-of-factly. Yugi's face burned, again. Had he misread their situation that badly? If Kaiba was at all offended by the suggestion that Yugi didn't know where they stood, he didn't let it show.

"I have conditions." Yugi craned his neck to gauge the reaction. He caught the slightest hint of a frown; Seto knew exactly what was coming and didn't stop him. "You have to let my, no, *our,* friends come over." Seto's distaste was immediate and plain.

“Fine.”

“You’ll have to get along with Jounouchi.” The look Kaiba shot him wasn’t anger. It was disgust. Yugi had worried this would be a sore spot, especially after the last time the two of them had been in a room together. “He’s my best friend, Seto.” Yugi pouted, watching as for just a moment Kaiba was marginally disarmed by the use of his first name from his lovers lips.

“I will do no such thing.”

But Yugi laughed, because he knew that tone, and it certainly wasn’t a no. As before, he found it easy, here in the warm weight of Seto’s arms, to shrug off every reservation he’d had within the last few minutes. The logical part of his brain that he knew should have examined the giant red flags in the room quietly buried itself back into his subconscious. He buried his own head tighter into the nape of Seto’s neck.

“Okay. I’ll move in.” He said it knowing full well it would have been his answer no matter what Seto had said back. “Was work hard today?” he asked, a shy whisper, a small callback to the way Seto had come through the door.

“Nothing unusual.”

Yugi absent mindedly ran his fingers over his sore throat; didn’t let himself think much about it.

Seto did not sleep well that night.

He rarely did, fully. Sleep was a surrender of vigilance and he had never once in his life been able to afford it. Not as a child in that house, not as the boy who had to stay awake to make sure Mokuba kept breathing, not as the man who ran an empire that would be devoured the instant he stopped watching it. So he lay in the dark with a warm weight against his side and did what he did every night instead of sleeping. He reviewed.

He could call up the moment with perfect clarity, because he could call up everything with perfect clarity; it was both his gift and the architecture of his particular hell. He’d felt Yugi’s pulse hammering under his fingers with his hand wrapped around his throat, felt the stutter of panic go through his body, and for a sliver of a second Seto

had not been entirely present in his own body. Something from his past had been driving. Something that wanted to push and push and see what came up out of the pressure.

Every time he lost the plot, every time the control slipped and the cruelty surfaced, some grief-blind animal part of Seto was scanning Yugi's face for the Pharaoh. For the change. He pushed Yugi because some idiot corner of him still believed that if he made it dangerous enough, if the stakes climbed high enough, the way they always had in the old days when death was on every table, then the other one would come back to meet him.

It was never going to come. Seto knew this with the entire weight of his intellect. He had built his whole life on the principle that any locked thing could be opened by a man willing to be ruthless enough. This was the one lock that did not answer to ruthlessness. It was a fresh bereavement, dozens of times over, administered by his own hand and the acid tasted of resentment. He would force himself to choke it down. No one, he knew realistically, pained more than Yugi. But he felt it anyway.
He hated himself in those moments with a precision he reserved for nothing else.

Despite himself, he loved him fiercely. Not the ghost. Yugi. The wild eccentric goth Yugi who had made his heart skip a beat the first time he had ever thought about dueling him. The one who helped his family run a game shop and triple-texted, laughed too easily and looked at Seto, after everything, with a warmth Seto had done absolutely nothing to deserve. Seto had spent so long telling himself it was the Pharaoh he wanted that the truth had been able to grow up underneath unobserved, like something rooting in the dirt.

Rivalry, malice, revenge- all of these things came easily. He searched for him because looking for him was easier than the thing that had actually happened, which was that Seto Kaiba had fallen hard for a person who was alive, and present; a liability, a catastrophe waiting to occur. The universe had a tendency to take note of the things that Seto loved, and by acknowledgment he felt this was permission for the universe to come and collect them.

Just an acknowledgment of love pushed the idea in his brain that the loss was already in motion somewhere out past the edge of what Seto could see, and that the only question remaining was how.
He could not find the seam between love and possession. He turned the two words over in the dark; they were the same word. To love a

thing was to need it not to leave. To need it not to leave meant to make leaving impossible. To make leaving impossible was to hold it so completely, know its every movement, close off its every exit, eliminate its every alternative, until it could not be taken because there was nowhere left for it to be taken to.

That was not a perversion of love, to Seto. That was love performed correctly, love with the sentiment burned off and only the function remaining. Other people, he had decided long ago, simply loved badly. They left their treasures lying out in the open and then wept when the world did what the world always did, and called their carelessness trust.

He would not be paying that price again, not for Yugi, not for anyone. He would keep what he loved the only way keeping had ever worked: in a fist, watched, accounted for, allowed no door.

Beside him, Yugi stirred, made a small sound, and turned in his sleep to press closer, his hand coming to rest flat over Seto's heart as though he had any idea what was kept behind it. Seto looked down at him in the dim, ugly light of the emerging morning and felt the whole tangled mass of it move through him at once.

He laid his hand over Yugi's, where it rested on his chest. It was tender. It was also a man closing his hand over a thing to confirm it had not yet gotten away.

"You're not going anywhere," Seto told him, very quietly. It was not a reassurance. It was not even, really, addressed to Yugi. It was a sentence Seto said to the universe, a flat refusal issued into the dark by the one man arrogant enough to think he could argue with it.

He did not get back to sleep. He watched the window turn from gray to gold with the rising sun, his hand over Yugi's the entire time, and somewhere underneath the vigilance and the calculation and the cold certainty, in a place he would have died before admitting existed, he let himself be warmed by the presence.

When he woke up that morning, panic began to set in when Yugi saw the boxes of his things in the foyer.
He had, as one would naturally think, assumed that moving day would be a longer discussion. Plan a date, give him time to tell his grandfather, arrange his schedule. Seto had simply called and arranged for his things to be moved by the time Yugi had climbed out of bed.

It was hard to imagine not being able to hide away in his room ever again, which had been his one place of solace over his lifetime. A place where he could isolate away from the chaos and dread of the outside world. Alone, *with Atem*, hiding away in their own world. His chest clenched painfully, acknowledging that this was a wound that could never heal and putting his own internal defenses back up to shut himself down before he let his mind wander. Yugi let himself briefly acknowledge the pain, and shut it back out. It was the only way you survive a hurt that deep.

In Kaiba's territory, he felt like a prey in an open field, exposed at all times. Yugi understood a large part of this was his own defense mechanisms working in overtime; as his fight or flight seemed to be permanently switched on since the day he found himself lost, alone in his own body. He wondered absentmindedly how long the art of shutting down would protect him until his heart gave out.
He did what he always did when the panic became too much. He pulled out his phone and turned to his friends.

Yugi typed it three times before he sent it.

so i'm moving in with seto

The chat, which had been dormant since the night before, came alive almost instantly.

WHAT. Jounouchi had responded so quickly that he was sure he must have been holding his phone, ready to say good morning when Yugi broke the news.

moving in?? jfc— Honda.

okay when is this happening, — Anzu. *when did you decide this*

Yugi patted one of the few boxes, the ones that had appeared at seven that morning, carried out by a crew in matching polos before Yugi had even finished his coffee. He considered, briefly, fudging the timeline out of embarrassment. He shook the thought away. He took a picture of the boxes in the hallway and followed up quickly with,

last night, he typed. *he asked last night. i woke up to all my things here*.

The typing indicators flickered for a long time after that. He could picture all three of them in three different phases of horror, staring at their phones with a shared disapproval.

we're coming over, Jou announced. Yugi almost protested, but stopped himself. Seto had said himself his friends could come over. He wanted, hell, needed to see them. Anything to keep his own dark thoughts from swallowing him alive. His friends were all he had to ground him.

He smiled despite himself, briefly acknowledging the tsk'ing of his friends continuing to no response in the chat.

They arrived within the hour; Yugi was sure they had all probably been together when he messaged, and spilling out into the hallway with the easy chaos that Yugi had missed so much it physically ached to hear it. Anzu let out a low whistle at the sheer scale of the place. Honda immediately started opening doors he had no business opening. Jou dropped onto the absurd couch like he'd lived there his whole life. Yugi briefly thought to himself how much it felt like home with their presence. Anywhere with them felt like home.

For a few minutes it was just nice. It was just his friends, in a room, teasing him about the marble and the view and the fact that the kitchen alone was bigger than the entire game shop. Yugi laughed and let himself be folded back into them, and felt, for the first time in weeks, almost like a human again.

Then Anzu got close enough to actually look at him.
"Yugi." Her voice changed. She reached out, fingers hovering near his jaw, not quite touching. "What happened to your neck?"

The room went quiet. Yugi's hand came up on reflex, too late, to cover what the collar of his tank top didn't. He'd checked the mirror that morning and decided it was mostly hidden. Maybe even mistake for a hickey. It was not, he understood now, mostly hidden. The bruises had darkened overnight into a clear band of finger-shaped marks, deliberate and unmistakable, wrapped most of the way around his throat.

"Oh, that's.. it's nothing," Yugi said, and heard immediately how thin it came out. "It's not a big deal."

Honda had crossed the room. Jou was already off the couch. The three of them were looking at his neck with three identical expressions, and he felt incredibly small under the scrutiny, like a child being scolded by adults.

"That's not nothing, man," Honda said quietly. "Those are definitely fingers."

“It’s,” Yugi gave a small laugh, going for breezy, landing nowhere near it. He tugged the collar up. “We just, you know. It got a little rough. Last night. It’s fine.” His face was burning. The words were technically a lie and technically not and he couldn’t make any of them sound the way he needed them to. “It looks worse than it is. I’m fine. Honestly.”

But his demeanor was doing all the talking his mouth wasn’t. He wouldn’t quite meet their eyes. His hand stayed at his collar like he could press the bruises back under his skin. There was no ease in him, none of the sheepish glow a person might actually have telling friends a too-honest detail about their sex life. He looked caught. Anzu didn’t say anything for a moment. She just looked at the marks, and then at his face, and then back at the marks, and her eyes went bright and furious and frightened all at once.

“Yugi,” she said, very gently, in the voice you use when you don’t want a stray animal to bolt. “What did he do to you?”

“It’s not like that.” It came out too fast.

Jou’s jaw was tight. “Then what’s it like? I have never left bruises like that on anyone.”

“You'd have to be getting some action in order for that to happen.” Honda muttered. Jounouchi went to protest, but the dirty look from Anzu shut them both down and put them back on their best behavior.

Yugi opened his mouth, and found he had absolutely nothing to put in it that would survive being said out loud.

“Can we just unpack?” he said finally, small. “Please. I really don’t want to do this right now. Can we just.. I’m happy you’re here. Can we just unpack?”

Nobody moved for a second. Then Anzu, still watching him, picked up the nearest box and set it on the counter, and said, in a careful voice that promised this was not over, “Yeah. Okay. Let’s unpack.”

Jounouchi went to protest again, but Anzu shot him another look and shut him down. This was, arguably, the worst place to have a discussion, no matter the circumstances. He understood and nodded in confirmation, staying quiet.

They unpacked. And every few minutes one of them would glance at his neck and then at each other, and Yugi would feel it, and pretend

he didn't, and reach up again to make sure his collar hadn't slipped.

Seto came home a little after eight.

Yugi heard the door, then the small domestic sounds of him shedding the day; the coat, the keys set down with precision, the particular quiet of a man recalibrating from the version of himself the world got to the version that came home. Yugi had trained himself well to listen out for it.

Dinner was already out, something the kitchen staff had left warming. Mokuba had come down and taken his food to his room, sparing Yugi a quick hi and rushing back to whatever multiplayer game he had immersed himself in. Yugi had waited to eat.

"You got it all put away," Seto observed, having walked through the hallway and noting the boxes were gone. Yugi's small amount of belongings had been absorbed into the vast bedroom over the course of the afternoon, folded into closets and shelves until you'd hardly know it had arrived at all. "I assumed it would take you the week, you're quite sentimental."

"I had help," Yugi said, and couldn't quite keep the warmth out of it. "Jou and Honda and Anzu came over. They basically invited themselves. It was nice, actually. We hadn't all been together in forever." He smiled at the memory of it. After their initial awkward confrontation, the rest of the afternoon had fell into easy conversation and laughter. Jounouchi and Yugi played a round of duel monsters (Yugi, of course, winning quickly,) Honda spouting off about a recent failed date, Anzu excitedly recalling all of her favorite hidden gems in NYC, which she would soon be returning to in less then a few weeks. "They were impressed. Honda got lost trying to find the bathroom."

Seto's expression did something subtle and unamused. He pulled out his chair and sat with the unhurried grace he did everything in. "Jounouchi was in my home."

"He helped me carry things. He was on his best behavior."

"I'll have the couch cleaned." A beat, perfectly dry. "Did he manage the entire visit without an accident? I do hope he's potty trained."

Yugi laughed, helpless, the way he always did when Seto turned that flat contempt into something almost funny. "He's a person, Seto. He's house-trained and everything, I promise."

“Debatable.” But there was the faintest pull at the corner of Seto’s mouth, the closest he came to letting a joke land, and Yugi felt the small private pleasure of having drawn it out of him. It was so easy, sometimes, in the warm ordinary minutes. It was so easy to forget what was in the shadows.

They ate. Yugi talked, because he was good at filling Seto’s silences and had come to find a strange comfort in carrying a conversation for two. He was halfway through a story about Anzu’s dance company when he noticed Seto had stopped eating.
Seto was looking at his neck.

Yugi’s hand twitched toward his collar before he could stop it, and he made himself set it back down, but it was too late; Seto had seen the reflex. His gaze rested on the band of bruises with an unreadable focus. They were ugly now, fully darkened, deliberate and finger-shaped, wrapped most of the way around Yugi’s small throat.

“Your friends,” Seto said. It wasn’t quite a question. “They saw that.”

“I..” should he lie? “Yeah..” Yugi’s face went hot. “They asked me about it.”

“And.”

“And I told them it was a sex thing.” It came out fast and flustered, the same way it had come out that afternoon. But, Yugi argued with himself, was that not the truth? Why did it seem so hard to say? They had not dropped it. Seto could hear that they had not dropped it, the way he could hear most things Yugi did not say. He could hear it in the speed of the answer and the careful way Yugi had not turned his neck more than he had to. He set down his fork.

Seto felt an inkling of shame. The knowledge that he had taken something further than he should have from a person who let him take almost everything. But underneath the shame, rising through it, warming it, was a stronger feeling. Seto did not look away from it because he had never been a coward about his own ugliness.

Pride.

Sick, hot, possessive pride. Because Yugi had defended him. Had stood in a room in front of the three people he loved the most, with Seto’s fingerprints darkening on his throat, and had covered for him. Had taken the evidence of Seto’s loss of control and called it something they shared, something private, and protected it. And he was wearing

it now, openly, at the dinner table, carrying the mark Seto had left like it belonged on him, like it was his to carry.

Some deep, broken, acquisitive thing in Seto's brain looked at the band of bruises around Yugi's throat and did not see harm. It saw mine, written on him in a place the whole world could read. It saw proof, dark and undeniable, that the thing Seto loved had chosen, again, to belong to him over belonging to anyone else.

The pride sat there in his chest, warm and certain, refusing to be ashamed of itself, and he let it, because he had stopped pretending to himself a long time ago that what he felt for Yugi obeyed any of the rules other people's love obeyed.

"They should mind their own business," Seto said, finally, evenly. He reached across the table. His fingers found the edge of the bruise, almost tenderly, tracing the marks he'd left without any of the force that had left them. Yugi went still under the touch. "But you handled it correctly."

"It really wasn't a big deal," Yugi said quietly, and Seto noted, with that same warm sick certainty, that Yugi leaned very slightly into his hand as he said it.
"No," Seto agreed, "It wasn't."

He did not apologize. He let his hand rest at the side of Yugi's throat a moment longer, where the pulse beat steady and warm, and brought his lips to it. Yugi's body stiffened for just a moment, before Seto quickly stood up and, with ease, hoisted him up on the dining room table.

Seto leaned between him, with Yugi's legs pressed against his side, kissing up and down his jaw and neck, licking against the bruises. Yugi felt himself melting into his touch, already fumbling with his jeans with one hand as the other held him propped up.

"Is this a good idea?" Yugi protested weakly, thinking of Mokuba. Seto let out a soft snort.

"If he comes down this late, that's his own fault. That brat should have joined us for dinner to begin with." He spread Yugi out on the cool surface of the table and took his time, mouth moving down his chest, hands mapping him, and Yugi arched up into all of it, the polished wood smooth and cold against his back.

Seto opened him slow and careful, slicked and patient, until Yugi was

a shaking mess of want, fingers scrabbling for purchase against the table edge.

Seto used the remaining lube that Yugi, once again, hesitantly noted had already been in his pocket, and generously coated himself with it. He aligned the head of his cock up between him and pushed into him slowly, savoring as Yugi cried out, and Seto caught the sound with his mouth, swallowed it, set a deep rolling rhythm that had Yugi seeing white at the edges. The table rocked faintly beneath them. Yugi wrapped his legs around him and let go of his mind for the moment.

Seto's hand kept finding his throat.

The hand would slide up his chest, his collarbone, and come to rest against the side of his neck, against the band of bruises blooming there, and Seto's thumb would move over the marks, and his breath would catch on something when he felt Yugi tense for an assault that would not come.

Seto was picturing it; with every drag of his hand to Yugi's throat Seto saw it, the grip tightening, the small face going wide and raw beneath him, but he could not make himself do it. He looked at the bruises he'd already left and could not let his hand close. Some thread of the cold shame from earlier had followed him here and wrapped itself around the impulse and held it still.

"Fuck-" His voice came out wrecked, which never happened. Seto Kaiba did not come apart during sex; he took, and he watched, and he stayed contained behind his own control no matter what the rest of him was doing. But tonight the control was fraying in front of Yugi's eyes, his rhythm losing its precision, his breath gone ragged and uneven, his composure dissolving into something raw and human. He pressed his forehead to Yugi's, panting, eyes shut.

Seto got a hand around his lover and stroked him in time, and Yugi shattered, crying out, spilling between them, his whole body locking. And Seto followed an instant later, and for the first time Yugi could remember, Seto was not silent. A sound tore out of him, low and helpless and undone, his face buried in Yugi's neck, his whole frame shuddering as he emptied himself deep, gripping Yugi like he was the only fixed thing in a falling world. The cry was small and it was involuntary and it was, Yugi understood dimly through his own haze, the most vulnerable sound he had ever heard.

They stayed like that, tangled on the table, both of them shaking,

Seto's face still pressed into the crook of Yugi's neck and his breath hot and unsteady against the bruises.

"You were so good," Seto murmured into his skin, when he could speak. His voice had gone soft, almost slurred, the praise spilling out of him in the loose unguarded moments after, when his walls were lowest. "Today. With them." He pressed a kiss to the marks. "I'm proud of you. You're so good for me."

Yugi, boneless and flushed as he was floating in the afterglow, felt the praise land somewhere deep and starved, felt his chest go warm and tight. He felt himself helplessly want to be worthy of that praise. To hear he was loved and wanted once again. He turned his face into Seto's hair and held on and did not let himself hear what the words actually meant. Not yet. In that moment it was only warmth. In that moment it was the best thing he'd ever been told. He bit back an "I love you" that he desperately wanted to say, to avoid himself the hurt of not hearing it back.

As Seto removed himself and got himself back together, Yugi felt the cold hit him all at once. The cold of their bodies separating, the cold in his veins at what lurked beneath Kaiba's words, the cold in being alone in his head with no voice to answer him back no matter how loudly he was crying out inside.

He found himself in front of one of the many guest bathroom toilets moments later, throwing up so violently that he thought he may turn himself inside out. The cold inside him did not fade even as he laid down next to Seto's warm body that night.

Something kept the word abuse from ever leaving Yugi's lips in full in regards to Seto. Guilt, he wagered, was the primary factor. Insecurity. Inferiority. He had constantly grappled with feeling like he did too much and put Seto through too much to complain now. That he would not and could not live up to the ghost of Atem that he felt Seto was still, at some level, chasing. That he knew, realistically, he would always be chasing too. The chasm left by his departure was so wide in Yugi that it took everything in him to fight and avoid looking at it to keep from being consumed into the dark.

He needed this. And he did, despite it all, love Seto too.

Before Seto had come back into his life full force, there had been so much calm into Yugi's life. Normalcy. It had been unbearable. He had

felt like there was a sinking weight around his neck, but no one notice him drowning. Everyone around him returned to their normal lives, went on with their futures. But he couldn't. No one prepared him on how to be normal, how to live in a brain and body alone without Atem, how to wake up and eat breakfast and face a day where you were, almost, guaranteed to fall back into your bed in one piece.

Yugi thrived in survival mode. It came with instructions, like a game. You just had to get through to the next obstacle, the next bad thing, face the next challenge, breaking apart was not an option and you did not have time to sit down and examine all the damage that was being created in your soul along the way.

But now, there was no more path to follow, no more fights to brave. There was only a white canvas left for Yugi to paint his future, and Yugi felt nothing but his own existential dread staring back at him when he looked at its blank fabric, unable to move the paint brush.

Yugi would not use the phrase that he deserved this, because that implied punishment. He was not being punished, he argued with himself. He felt a solace in Kaiba, who was, for all intents and purposes, broken in the same way. A man who found his peace amidst the storm as well. Yugi felt wholeheartedly that the chance at a normal life was lost the moment he solved the millennium puzzle. Fate brought him through Hell, and it lead him right here to Seto.

It was a feeling akin to resignation.

Chapter 5: if it's alright with you

Chapter Summary

Kaiba does not half ass things. Everyone has a normal one.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seto, ever the light sleeper, startled awake at an unfamiliar sound in the dark. The sound of crying, he registers after a few seconds of coming out of his haze of sleep. He rolls over to see that Yugi has his back turned to him, curled into a ball. He gently places a hand on his cheek, feeling it stained with tears, and realizes Yugi is still asleep. Instinctively, he pulls him close, which seems to begin to rouse him from his nightmare.

Seto would not, afterward, be able to give a clean account of what happened next or why. He, who remembered everything, who reviewed his own conduct nightly with a prosecutor’s precision; there was a blur.

Yugi, in his vulnerable state, had mentioned Atem by name. And it set something off in Seto that he couldn't explain. Jealousy? Resentment? Disrespect? He tried his best to replay the moment in his head to understand what exactly he felt in the moment that could have lead to his, in his opinion, immature reaction. What had crossed his mind? Had he for a split second thought about how could never have Atem in that way- how he could never have Yugi in that way? Hearing his boyfriend cry for another man in his bed?

He understood, in the awake part of his brain, that Yugi deserved to mourn. That he could not suffer out loud, so he shoved it somewhere dark and deep inside to suffer silently, just as Seto. It was something that they did not discuss, but just accepted as a reality. Seto had very little interest in the past and dwelling on it. However, the asleep part of his brain acted instinctively.

Before he had fully woke, he found himself jumping out of bed and crouching down to Yugi on the floor, the sleepy anger simmering away into confusion. Yugi had hit the nightstand face first and crumpled to the floor and cried out, fully pulling Seto into consciousness. *He* had grabbed and threw him so hard that he had

sent him face first into it and off the bed.

Seto reached over to examine his face in the dark and Yugi flinched instinctively, before resigning and letting Kaiba touch his face. He pulled away when he felt something wet and immediately turned on the lamp next to the bed. Blood. A ton of it.

“Fuck.” The words slipped unintentionally from Seto’s mouth- in normal circumstances Yugi may have panicked if he noticed that Seto had turned decidedly whiter than usual, or the small tremor to his always surgeon-steady hands. He noted that Yugi’s eyes didn’t react to the light- likely a concussion. He had blood pouring from his forehead from a horizontal line splitting into his eyebrow, not a terribly deep gash but a notorious area for bleeding. In line with the gash his lip had been split, not badly enough for stitches but enough that it had already began to swell.

Seto felt sick. It wasn't from the sight of blood.

He gathered up the top sheet from the bed and bunched them up to press against his head. Yugi winced, dazed, and a little confused in the rush of things, still trying to decipher if he had fallen or if Seto had really thrown him.

“It-it’s ok,” he tried, and reached his hand out to touch Seto’s face. Seto frowned and caught his hand in his. “I think I fell? I was having a nightmare..” Yugi’s speech was weighed down with sleep and the fog of pain, disoriented from going from bed to floor, dark to light, in seconds.

“No, it's not. Stay still, I'm going to get someone to come look at you.” Kaiba reached over to grab his phone off the charging anchor and messaged a member of his staff, the discreet kind who handled what the Kaiba household couldn’t be seen at a hospital for; two-handed because the first attempt shook too badly to get the text out. In other circumstances he would be embarrassed. He was not afraid or panicked- he was ashamed. Another unfamiliar, foreign feeling that he hated to name. He got Yugi upright against the side of the bed and held the cloth there and did not let go.

“Is it bad? I'm sorry.” Yugi tried again, and could not understand the dark expression across Kaiba’s face.

“Don't apologize to me.” In only a few minutes, the doctor, that Kaiba had scarcely remembered to get the name of when he had hired him on to the staff, opened the door and assessed the situation briefly. He

knelt down and silently got to work, dampening the clothes that had begun to stick to Yugi's forehead with dried blood to remove them and clean the area, like this was just another night for him. It was, in fact, just that. The doctor finished applying iodine and rummaged through a bag.

"I can glue most of this, but it is going to need a few stitches." He did not look at Yugi for permission, but at Seto. Yugi would have felt more unnerved if his head was not now throbbing. Kaiba gave a nod of approval and he began to work. While blood and medical procedures did not typically bother Kaiba, he found he could not watch.

"I'm done. I don't feel any fractures or additional swelling. Just a mild concussion; you may have some headaches and light sensitivity. Still, it would be best to have someone monitor you for the next few hours. Should I send one of my nurses?" Seto shook his head and dismissed him. He nodded and exited the room as discreetly as he had entered.

Seto stayed up the rest of the night, vigilantly watching Yugi breathe in and out as he rested the best he could under the strong- albeit unnecessary, painkillers Kaiba insisted that he have.

In the morning Seto stood in the bathroom doorway after exiting the shower while Yugi looked at himself in the mirror; the glued and partially stitched gash, the bruise spreading purple-green down the side of his face in an almost perfect L shape, the fat lip.

"You're not going in to the shop," Seto said. Quietly. Not a command, for once, but closer to a plea. "Not like that, not with a concussion. I'll call. I'll tell him you're sick."

Yugi looked at his own ruined face and understood the gravity of the request. Seto didn't want anyone to see. And Yugi, who should have been furious, or hurt, or felt anything at all- who knew somewhere that being kept home so the marks could fade was its own kind of cage, just nodded. He didn't want anyone to see either. The shame belonged to both of them now, and they were going to hide it together.

"I'll call him myself," Yugi said. "It'll seem normal if it's me." Seto didn't feel the same pride as before. He felt like a child who had thrown a tantrum and only succeeded in damaging his favorite toy.

“I’ll stay with you.” Seto said as an afterthought, refusing to look at his own reflection in the mirror as Yugi tried to tame his hair into something manageable, petite body fitting fully on the sink to prop himself up to face the mirror. Seto turned away to leave before Yugi’s voice pulled him back.

“What happened?” Yugi asked, meekly. He had naturally deduced that he did not roll out of the bed hard enough to do this to himself.

“I threw you.” Kaiba stated plainly. He was not a liar; but his mouth went dry anyway at the admission. Yugi noticeably frowned.

“Why?” Yugi vaguely remembered a dream about Atem, a night spent talking in their room, putting together a deck before a tournament, the faint sound of *aibou* almost clear enough to hear. Just the thought pained him enough that he preferred to focus on the dull throb in his head. Had he mentioned Atem in his sleep?

“I was jealous.” Seto stated simply, and Yugi was a little startled by how straightforward he was. “But what I did was impulsive, I’m not a child. I'm not someone who wants to break what is mine.” Seto crosses his arms for a moment, breaking eye contact only for a second, and then meeting his eyes with the same intensity.

“And you are mine, correct?” Yugi tries not to hesitate in his answer, but realizes that he has to push all thoughts of Atem out of his mind before his voice finds its way back into his throat.

“Of course I am.” He says, as firmly as he can muster. It's enough for Seto. He turns to leave, but Yugi catches him with another question.

“Do you think we will always be this way?” Yugi asked quietly, his face steady but still, somehow, betraying the pain that underlined the question. He does not have to specify. They know they are broken as people. All gas, no brakes, pointed directly at each other on a highway. The kind who threaten to jump off ledges or kill one another for sport. The kind of men so entangled in one another that their obsession with one another has created a body count.

The question hangs heavy in the air for a moment.

“I don't know.” Kaiba answers. He thinks it's closer to a no than a yes, but he can't bring himself to say it, because he doesn't have all the answers, try as he might.

“Do you love me?” Yugi asks more persistently this time, bracing

himself.

“Of course I do.” The reply comes so easily, as though it was the most obvious thing in the world, no cryptic phrases or undertone, that Yugi can barely believe he said it. The words are enough that Yugi decides he has already forgiven him, for this infraction and the next.

Seto schedules himself to work the next few days remotely. Part guilt- wanting to make sure that Yugi is genuinely okay and taking care of himself. Part shame- he doesn't want anyone else to see him like this. Mokuba was bad enough, the morning immediately after at breakfast.

”Holy shit, your face!” He had exclaimed the moment he walked in the kitchen, well aware that his brother and Yugi had been home all evening. Yugi couldn't meet his eyes.

“Language,” Seto warned coolly, not bothering to look at him.

“It’s fine, it’s nothing.” Yugi had instinctively responded, looking away. Mokuba immediately looked at his brother, sharp eyed and irritated.

“Seto, come on,” he started, but his older brother cut him off immediately.

“Mokuba, stay out of adult matters.” Was his only reply. Mokuba had huffed angrily and walked out without eating.

He couldn't stomach it again.

Yugi has called off for his third day in a row, and he was sure that his friends would be calling and coming around soon enough. He had spent the last few days reading, playing games with Seto in his spare time once he finished work, cuddling, and soaking up all the extra attention that he could. At the moment, he was napping curled up against Seto’s thigh, hormones tormenting him in his sleep.

He dreamt of Battle City– though filled with dark times, Yugi now only saw images of a fierce and ravishing Kaiba, sweat glistening on his beautiful skin, a fire in his eyes that lit something up in Yugi even if only watched through his partner’s eyes. A distant, seductive voice in the distance, *”Carve my name into your memories,”* and so, deeply, he did.

He woke up with the thrum of excitement still under his skin as though for a moment he had been back there, distant and fading fast

like a memory that was never truly his. What remained was the undeniable heat of arousal. Seto had glanced down at Yugi as he woke up and put his hand on him, but went back to his laptop immediately. Yugi slyly raised his hand and put it underneath the laptop, high up between his thighs, and gave a gentle squeeze.

“No Yugi.” Seto tries to sound stern. Yugi sighed. Seto had been treating him as extra fragile the last three days, and he was becoming increasingly frustrated as a result.

“I was dreaming about you,” Yugi tries a new plan to win him over as he sits up. “Watching you duel, ready to crush me, eyes full of fire,” he practically purrs. It works in getting Seto’s attention- it's undeniable the sexual tension that they have always shared through the years, Atem fronting or not, taken out in the heat of the moment of a duel. Hearing Yugi talk so openly about it rattles him.

He looks away from his laptop fully now. Yugi is flush, hair wild with bed head, eyes desperate as he is pleading with his eyes and begins to make a show of rubbing himself through his pajama pants, anything to catch his interest. Seto clenches his jaw and tries to ground himself at the display.

“Please Seto,” he whines, pouting. “I need you so bad..” He whined playfully, pitiful in a manufactured way. He knows what he’s doing, Seto thinks. Seto sighs and swallows hard, begging *kills* him.

“We've been over this. I don't want to hurt you. You need to heal.” Kaiba realizes he sounds like he is trying to convince himself as much as Yugi. As a response, Yugi lays it on a little thicker, biting his lip gently, avoiding where it is healing, and grabbing himself firmly through the fabric of his pajama bottoms, beginning to slowly stroke and give the gentlest of moans.

Seto looks down at his laptop and realizes he has typed the same sentence in the email he has been trying to send out three different times. He sighs and shuts his laptop, putting it next to them on the night stand. He can see Yugi beaming and begin to crawl over to him. He puts his hand up in protest.

“Stop. No sex.” He states firmly, despite himself. Yugi pouts and begins to open his mouth to protest again, but Seto cuts him off. “Pull it out. Touch yourself for me.”

Yugi blushes, suddenly feeling shy. Despite his growing confidence with his lover and his previous boldness, Kaiba always finds a way to

turn the tides when he needs to. But, overwhelmed by hormones and the denial of physical intimacy the past few days, he does as he's told. He slips himself over and out of the band of his pajamas and, shyly, starts to stroke himself. When Seto bites down on his own lip, he twitches violently in his own hand and tightens his grip.

Yugi, feeling a little more confident under the intense focus of Kaiba, moans and strokes himself a little faster, grip tighter. Seto feels his breath hitch- it takes everything in him to keep his hands to himself. Yugi looks so beautiful- he thinks, wild hair and smudged eyeliner that did not come off fully from his last shower, bare chest with the faintest trace of marks Seto had left from a past morning of love marking. Yugi's eyes widen ever so slightly as Seto slips down his own pajama pants, his own erection throbbing and dark pink with want.

"S-seto," Yugi stutters out as precum starts to make his hand slick, enamored by his gorgeous boyfriend and thinking, despite everything, how lucky he is to have followed the thread of fate that has brought them together in this moment.

"Come here." Kaiba's voice is low, almost a growl, and Yugi easily fits into his lap. Seto is gentle when he kisses him, careful to avoid putting pressure on any of the bruises on his face, and tilts his own face to the opposite side of his stitches. Yugi flinches for only a moment, the pain mostly gone from his busted lip, but Seto pulls back immediately and opts to kiss his cheek instead as he wraps a hand around both of their erection and brings them together. The feeling is different, Yugi admits, but sends a small jolt of pleasure through his spine all the same. Seto brushes a thumb over their heads to smear the generous amount of precum over them both and begins to stroke them both gently. Yugi gasps and uses Seto's shoulders as leverage.

"You're so gorgeous," Seto purrs, voice deep with his own need as he tightens his grip. Yugi looks up to make eye contact with his lover- Seto notes in the back of his mind that he almost looks hypnotized, and takes in the flurry of praises that begin to spill from Kaiba's lips as he compliments and worships him all at once.

"And you're all fucking mine," Seto gasps out, and Yugi thinks it sounds like a promise more than a threat this time. They climax impossibly close together, spilling over Kaiba's hand as he slows his pace, making sure to milk every bit of seed from his lover.

Yugi shudders violently from his release, falling limp into his arms. Seto takes him easily, not bothering to get up immediately to clean

up. Yugi notices and, with no protest from Kaiba, brings his right hand up to his lips and runs a tongue over his fingers, then takes two fingers into his mouth to suck them clean. Seto shudders visibly and accepts, deep in his mind, that Yugi really will be the end of him. He couldn't think of a more fitting finish for himself.

Seto pulls Yugi into him and Yugi notes, affectionately, that he holds him as though he might break. They lay there silently for several minutes, listening to each others heartbeats slow.

“I think you should take the next few weeks off.” Seto says offhandedly, producing a scoff from Yugi.

“I can't afford that.” Even saying it, Yugi knows it sounds absolutely silly. Seto would let him want for nothing. He pays no bills outside of his phone, the various new card packs he buys, takeout when he is tired of catered meals, and he has quite a hefty savings account still remaining from the giant lump sum of money Seto gave him as an apology for breaking his phone ages ago.

“Absurd. Anything you want, I'll make sure you have it.” Kaiba stated plainly, but Yugi already knew this. Yugi chuckles.

“Are you trying to make me a housewife?” Yugi suggested, a smile playing across his lips. “I really don't do it for any kind of compensation, to be honest. I would help my grandfather out anyway. He won't take no for an answer when it comes to pay.”

“Housewife.” Seto hmm’d for a moment, ignoring the rest of what Yugi had said. “Are you saying you want to marry me?” A cool tone, but as close nowadays as Seto got to playful. Yugi instantly blushed, flustered, fumbling for his words.

“It’s an expression– I think–” he stumbled, embarrassed, but Kaiba gave him an unsettling, and decidedly, seductive smirk. He grabs his chin delicately and brings their lips together, sweet and chaste, still mindful of the cut down his lip.

“I want to make you my little housewife.” He said, a hint of play in his voice. “I think marriage is a great idea.” Yugi’s eyes widened significantly, his slowing heart rate significantly picked its pace back up. Was Kaiba messing with him? He swore he felt sweat gather in his hairline when Kaiba shifted from where they were laying and reached over into their bedside dresser to pull out a small black box. Yugi’s face burned bright red so quickly that he felt dizzy. Kaiba was out of his mind.

“Marry me, Yugi.” Yugi’s mouth went dry, and he opened the box that Kaiba thrust towards him. A silver ring with sapphire thread through it in the velvet cushions. So it wasn't a joke. How long had he been planning this? Was he even planning this, or just keeping it for backup, like a well laid trap card? Yugi felt as though he was going through a near death experience; so much flashed before his eyes. The first time he laid eyes on Seto walking into their classroom. The first time Seto had beaten him up as kids, the first time they had dueled, the first time they had ever genuinely worked side by side. The good, the bad (notably, there had been a lot bad intermingled in there), the times Kaiba had genuinely come to his aid, the undeniable bond that kept them tied together from one lifetime to the next; even if, Yugi recognized, he could not fully call these memories his own and his alone.

“We can't get legally married here.” Was his only retort. It wasn't a no. He knew it would never be a no. He swallowed hard, as Seto slid the ring over his finger for him. It fit him perfectly. Of course it would.

“We can go to America on one of my business trips. I have dual citizenship.” Kaiba had put some thought into this. There was not much they could legally do here, but Kaiba had several assets in America at this point as well; from a legal standpoint, marrying to protect those assets made sense. Yugi imagined that proposing had very little to do with legality or logistics.

His words echoed in the back of his mind.

“There are no exits. There is only a ledge."

There was never a question. There was only an answer, and Seto already knew it was yes. Yugi couldn't imagine a world where he said no. And Yugi, for a brief moment wondered, who had who backed up to the ledge?

“Absolutely fucking not!” Jounouchi shouted so loudly over the phone that Yugi had to move his ear away from the receiver. In the background, he could hear Honda’s inquisitive voice asking what was going on.

“You are not marrying that sack of shit. Yugi, come on man.” Jounouchi expressed in disbelief. Honda in the background yelling “what??” This had not been a group chat message, he had at least had the courtesy to call this time before dropping a bomb. Honda snatched

the phone from Jou.

“Katsuya is just being dramatic, right? I did not hear that correctly? Yugi, you–we.. we will call you right back.” Yugi knew they were calling Anzu for advice. He heard a “hey, that's my phone!” quickly from Jou before the line went blank, and knew in a few minutes he would be getting a call and getting his ass chewed out. He didn't mind. It was comforting to be bitched out by his friends. He knew he was insane.

Instead of a regular phone call, the group chat messaging app call. Yugi hesitantly picked it up, and heard the long drawn outside of his friend the second he said hello.

“Yugi. Is this about him?” That took the breath out of him. This was the very first time any of his friends had directly spoken about Atem since he had left. There was no need for clarification. None of them knew how to approach it. Anzu thought, as she listened to the silence on the other line, that none of them had ever seen a person break the way that Yugi had when Atem was gone for good.

“Anzu.. I love Seto. I truly do.” His voice wavered, but he sounded truly sincere. He completely sidestepped the question that she asked. She knew why.

“You can't avoid talking about him forever.” It was almost a whisper. Honda and Jounouchi let her speak, feeling helpless.

“I can.” He didn't mean to say it, or admit it, or even address it. But he did. He shut up, and thought a moment. “I can't talk about it. I'm so sorry.” Anzu immediately felt her own heart break as she heard his voice crack. Jou felt it too.

“I have to go, I'm so sorry. I love you guys. I'll talk to you soon.” He rushed, and ignored their protests as he hung up. He put his fists to his head and pressed into his temples, trying to physically fight off the tears and thoughts that threatened their way to the surface.

“That didn't sound like it went well.” Seto’s voice was calm, almost humored. Yugi almost jumped out of his skin. It had been Seto’s first day back in the office; it was still so early in the day, he hadn't expected him for hours. He felt like a child caught doing something naughty.

Seto caught on immediately, noticing how his face blanched. He frowned. He shut the door behind him and sat next to him on the bed-

an act almost as startling. Was Kaiba coming to comfort him?

“You've never been afraid of me, Yugi.” He said, stern. “Now is not the time to start.” Seto ran a finger over the recent bruises over his face, a silent apology, and placed several kisses on different spots on his face.

Yugi is stunned by the genuine tone Kaiba has taken on, and feels his defenses reluctantly dropping. It crosses his mind that they may genuinely always be playing this game with one another, and it hurts. But Yugi doesn't know if either of them could survive another way.

“I'm not afraid of you, this is all just.. new for me.” Yugi answers as honestly as he can. Seto takes a moment to absorb the answer.

“I acted like a child. It won't happen again. I've put us both in an unfavorable position.” Seto continues, in an extremely uncharacteristic apology. He had made zero attempts to apologize for punching Jounouchi months back, and Yugi knew he was not sorry. He would certainly do that again. Kaiba had always been someone who was quick to turn to violence, historically. But he thought, maybe he was genuinely sorry about this.

“It’s ok, really.” Yugi offers, small, but gives his best attempt at a reassuring smile. Seto puts a hand gently behind his head and claws his fingers into his hair.

“No, it's not.” Seto looked like he had more to say, but apologies were never his strong point. They let it rest, and Yugi felt that same hand in his hair pull him close in an embrace.

On his fifth day out of work, Jounouchi shows up at his door. It was not all that unexpected. In fact, he would have probably shown up sooner if his own job didn't hold him hostage to varying swing shifts. Yugi could manage to dodge them or avoid their questions over message. He did not have the heart to avoid his bestfriend.

Yugi opened the door and watched what he assumed was a well-prepared speech drop into the void the moment Katsuya saw his face. By now, his face was in various stages of fading bruises, and the swelling had long since gone. He had to admit the bruising looked a little more dramatic now than what had actually happened. He knew Jounouchi would not accept any excuses that he gave him, so he stayed silent as they both tried to find words between them. He flinched only minimally as Jounouchi reached out to grab his chin,

turning his face from side to side gently to assess the damage.

“Yugi, is he here?” He asked it calmly; it was terrifying. Yugi shook his head.

“No, he’s at work. Why don't you come in, w- there's cameras out here.” He didn't know why he was explaining himself so openly, but it was out before he realized it. Jou stepped in and the door shut behind him, hand still on Yugi’s face. It was strangely, and almost uncomfortably, intimate. Yugi could feel his face warming up at the thought.

“I'm going to actually kill him.” Katsuya said lowly, still calm, a tremble to his hand that still has a grip on Yugi’s face. His eyes are intense.

“It was really an accident Jounouchi,” it sounds stupid the moment it leaves his mouth. “We weren't fighting, he-” he tries to turn away, but Jounouchi instinctively leans down closer to erase some of the gap between their height difference and puts both of his hands in Yugi’s hair, examining the rest of his face more closely in the light of the hallway. Yugi can't find his voice, and stops.

Jou takes his hand, gently, and examines the ring that is on his finger. He spins it, an unreadable expression plastered on his handsome face.

“Fuck, that looks expensive.” He says, without thinking. He gently lets go of Yugi. “Fuck!” He curses louder, exasperated, his voice echoing off the walls. Yugi instinctively wants to comfort him, but he has no idea how when he is the source of his frustrations.

“Yugi, man, I fucking hate this.” He runs his hands through his hair, a nervous trait that he's had since they were kids. “I hate this for you, I hate this for me, I fucking hate that scumbag,” he rambles, throwing his arms up in the air. He stops when he notices tears coming to Yugi’s eyes and has a moment of panic. He puts his hands out in a flurry as if it will physically stop the tears from coming.

“I just, I love you. I don't know what I'm trying to say.” He lands on, and chuckles sheepishly. “I love you, and I hate that dork Kaiba, and it's a little bit like a nightmare for me to see you in a situation I can't help you with.” Yugi recognizes that Katsuya is nervously trying to explain himself now, the way he has always panicked when he upsets anyone, especially Yugi. Yugi can't help but give a small laugh and despite everything, finds himself wrapping his arms around his Jounouchi, who flinches initially but almost immediately warms into

his touch and embraces him back.

“I love you too, Jounouchi.”

In the next minute, they realize they are both crying. A minute after that realization, they are both laughing, sniveling, two little idiots holding each other, who are terrible at feelings and talking but wonderful at being there for one another.

Yugi finds that at some point they have ended up as a pile on the floor, laughing at each other, sniffling, and Jounouchi is the first to pull away.

“I don't know how to be there for you this time,” he starts, his voice sincere, the anger that he walked in with gone now. “But I'll be there for you in whatever way you let me. Yuug.” He gives him a small smile, and brushes the the bangs out of his eyes. Yugi relishes in the moment, his longest friendship, his strongest mortal bond.

And then, Jounouchi kisses him, right there on the floor in the hallway of the Kaibas’ home, and it is like several cars crashing and piling up on the highway all at once.

What the hell?

Chapter End Notes

> Minor side note: I am aware, from my understanding, you cannot actually have a dual citizenship of Japan and America. But this is the land of pretend lol. I had an ending in mind but after finishing another 200 chapters of the manga I decided to take the scenic route to the end of this fic instead

Chapter 6: we've got a good thing going

Chapter Summary

Yugi can't help but think this is just the calm before the storm.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seto had known since he had checked the security camera notification from his front door that Jounouchi had stopped by, presumably unannounced. He had glanced down at his phone between two meetings and felt the familiar cold chill move through him once he saw who was at his door, the one that lived where other people kept their tempers, and he had done what he always did with this information. He had filed it. He had let it sit.

“The dog came by to visit.” Seto says as he walks into the bedroom. Yugi almost is tempted to lie, or play dumb, and opts for somewhere in between.

“You mean Jounouchi..?” He clarifies, and Seto nods.

“I could recognize his disgusting cheap cologne anywhere. It's stuck on my walls.” Seto starts to strip down next to the bed when he stops, and gives Yugi a look that he imagines may be the last vision a rabbit sees before a wolf strikes it. He presses his knees to the bed and leans over, putting his face in Yugi’s neck. He hesitates for just a moment before placing a soft kiss there.

“It’s stuck all over you, too.” Another man may be frightened by the implication in the words. Yugi can't explain what feeling is bubbling underneath his skin- arousal for the power when Seto speaks, fear in the unknown reaction that may lay ahead, the lust of being prey under Seto’s eye. He does shiver, for entirely the wrong reasons. He wishes, for a moment, that Seto would eat him alive.

“He hugged me,” Yugi explains, sounding meek without intending to shrink himself. He knew he had to pick his next few sentences carefully.

“When he saw your face?” Seto asks. Yugi nods.

“When he saw what I did to your face,” Seto reiterates, and it registers

to Yugi that Kaiba is standing at their bedside now completely naked, and still a threatening, looming, and overwhelmingly sensual, presence. Yugi feels like the question is a trap. But he isn't sure what he can do except answer.

“Y-yes, what you did to my face.” He was not sure if this was what Seto wanted at first. While no emotions registered across his face, his cock twitched violently at Yugi’s words. He felt internally pleased with himself for following the right steps so far to whatever song and dance they would be enacting tonight. Seto lowered himself back to the bed again and dimmed the light next to them, crawling over to Yugi and putting his face back in the crook of his neck. For a man who claimed to hate that cologne, he sure seemed entranced by it now.

Seto snaked a hand up Yugi’s back and grabbed his hair, gently at first. “And what else did you two do today, Yugi?” His voice is low and raspy, and Yugi’s own name sounds like venom on his tongue. Yugi can feel the blood rush out of his face and directly to his lower stomach. The color draining from his face seemed to take his voice with it. Kaiba’s hand grabbed significantly harder and pulled, his mouth finding its way to Yugi’s throat and licking up to his chin, as though licking the very taste of cologne off of him.

“He kissed me,” Yugi offered this up freely, yet felt as though he was under duress. He had no idea if Seto knew, if Seto was being jealous, or if Seto was referring to something else entirely. But he found whatever part of his brain that would normally tell him this was the worst possible time to have this discussion had been completely overridden by anticipation of the metaphorical gun at his temple.

Kaiba reached up under Yugi’s shirt and stripped it off one handed, only removing the hand currently clawed into his hair to get the shirt up over his head. He grabbed him by the chin and kissed his face this time, significantly less remorse and caution for the injuries on his face than before. Yugi didn't dare question it; so often lust looked just like anger with Kaiba, and the closer he could keep them intermingled the safer he would be.

“And what the fuck did you do?” His tone was on an edge that Yugi rarely heard it- he didn't sound rattled, but sounded as though he was a quarter inch from crashing if shaken the wrong way.

“I told him he couldn't do that.. he left.” Yugi answers as honestly as feels safe to do, and hopes this is enough. He knows he has to survive this if he wants to make sure Jounouchi survives, too, of course. He

feels Seto's thin fingers play with the waist band of his boxers, and he begins to push them down his hips.

"Do you want to fuck him?" The question is enough to throw Yugi for a loop- he certainly didn't expect the line of questioning to go in that direction. "Did you want to fuck him today, in my bed, that mangy fucking loser?" Kaiba realizes the anger seeping into his voice and bites into Yugi's neck, trying to feign some kind of emotional control before he speaks again.

"N-no! Seto, no, fuck-" Yugi protests, then fumbles as Seto finds a particularly sweet spot of his to suck on, sending shockwaves into his lower stomach. His head is so dazed between the confusion of the kiss early, Seto's approach, and the throb of his arousal flattening any fear he should reasonably be experiencing.

Seto leans back and pulls Yugi back with him, and breaks away from his neck.

"Suck me off." He commands, and Yugi wastes no time.

Yugi can't help but be awestruck as he looks up through his lashes, watching Seto throw his head back and claw at the bed beneath them as Yugi works him with his mouth and throat enthusiastically. Tears are streaming down his face; Kaiba is *huge* and Yugi is inexperienced, but what he lacks in experience, he makes up in heart.

And Kaiba is patient- so goddamn patient; he does not thrust up into his throat or grab him by the hair to force him to take more, as Yugi would expect with the tension between them right now. Quite the opposite, he is making every attempt to be still against his own pleasure and let Yugi set his own pace. Every pant, moan and gasp Seto makes above him sets off fire in his veins and makes him more determined to give him his all, swallow every bit of him, swallow every bit of the moment from before and forget it all.

In a move that he does not even expect from himself until it is happening, Yugi slowly brings his hand up to settle between Seto's inner thigh, and experimentally drifts lower until he finds himself at his ass. He runs his fingers over the entrance that is partially exposed due to the position of his legs and goes to insert a finger. Immediately, Seto's entire body flinches, his whole demeanor changes in seconds. Yugi feels panic at the pit of his stomach- Kaiba never has shown vulnerability like this, but Yugi recognizes a flinch when he sees one. He pauses, feeling as though he has overstepped something big.

He pulls back, prepared to launch into a flurry of apologies, and notices something worse on Kaiba's face than expected; he is clearly ashamed that he exposed himself in this way. He is not a man who has ever, willingly to Yugi's memory, exposed his weaknesses. They historically had always pushed each others boundaries and revelled in it. He can't help but feel as though he has done, and witnessed, something wrong, like this whole situation had not already spiraled out of control from start to finish.

"I'm so sorry- have you never-" he sputters out, which seems to horrify Seto more. He swallows hard before answering.

"I've had bad experiences." Is his quick explanation, spoken in the undertone that he doesn't want to speak on this at all. The admission of something so huge is said so casually that Yugi feels like the bed might actually swallow him up, if it had any mercy.

"Seto-" Yugi starts, unsure of where his words are going to land, and shifts himself up to move out of his position when Kaiba puts a hand out to stop him.

"Don't stop." Yugi hesitates for just a moment, but knows better than to question him. Seto seems desperate to get Yugi to forget what just happened. A little less impulsive now, he sticks his finger in his mouth quickly before he brings his mouth back to his cock, angled to keep an eye on Seto's expressions to monitor if he freezes up again. He is gentle, patient as Seto has taught him to be, as he works him open and wonders casually if Seto will kill him mid-act.

Yugi finds this the most disturbing part of the entire day. Past the kiss, past the strange angry foreplay and undertones implying there would be hell to pay. Yugi had longed to see some kind of genuine vulnerability from Seto for so long and the moment he had caught a glimpse of it, he felt like the world had sucked out all the air and left him vacuum sealed. He found himself wanting to go back ten minutes in the past and not crossing that boundary. The world seemed wrong.

Seto can see Yugi's mind start to leave the present, and grabs the back of his head as a physical reminder to come back to the here and now. Yugi can tell that he does not want him thinking further on what just happened.

"You want to fuck me, right? Not thinking about that stupid fucking mutt?" Something so vulgar always sounds so seductive when it falls from Seto's mouth; Yugi doesn't dignify the question with an answer.

Seto doesn't give him long to think about it either- he reaches over for the lube in their nightstand and hands it to Yugi, his expression unreadable but certainly not unconsenting.

There is resistance when he tries to push himself in- Kaiba is tense, and painfully tight, but Yugi has endless patience and, he finds, endless affection coursing through his veins. It's awkward to get into a rhythm; he continually whispers sweetly into Kaiba's ear to breathe and to trust him, hoping to keep his mind here with him, too. As he edges towards his climax far too quickly, he angles himself so that he can stroke Seto too, sending both of them over the edge only within minutes from start to finish. He loses himself buried deep inside of Seto, physically and mentally, and gently collapses on to his chest. He listens to their heavy breathing begin to slow and almost lets the rhythm lull him to sleep, anything to keep his mind focused on the moment.

Kaiba strokes Yugi's head as it lays on his chest, angry tension temporarily abaded in the afterglow but a strange air hanging between them. Yugi thinks he may love to talk about any of the things that just happened without having to fuck over them, but he wasn't sure if that was even something Seto was capable of doing. He wasn't sure if it was something he was capable of doing, either. Uncharacteristically, Kaiba is the first one to break the silence.

"My adopted father." He announces, and Yugi almost asks 'what' before he's able to absorb what the answer means; he was referring to a few minutes ago. "He was abusive in many ways. It would have been Mokuba if not me. It had to be me." His tone is even, separated from the words they are speaking, but Yugi understands Seto enough to know it means this is not a conversation for two. Seto briefly looks down to meet Yugi's eyes as he cranes his neck up to meet his face, and for a moment, Yugi sees just a very glimpse of a pain that has, and will continue to be, locked away behind carefully crafted walls the moment they break eye contact.

Seto predictably looks away first, and as an afterthought, adds: "His death made our lives, and the world, a significantly better place." Yugi knew that was the end of a conversation that he could not have been a part of if he tried. Yugi - and Seto - shared a thought briefly of who Kaiba might have been if his body had not been forced to carry the weight of another person's cruel choices.

"I'm sorry. I'm glad you told me." Yugi states, feeling small. He has no idea what to say to such a thing, and what a hell of a time and place

to share it. Seto feels as though it gives him some kind of upper hand; and maybe it does. The protective urge that fills Yugi's soul is one that he did not think he was even capable of feeling so strongly on his own; remnants of the courage imposed on him by Atem, no doubt. What a bizarre world where you find you suddenly want to protect, to the death, the one thing that certainly could and probably will kill you.

"I want to kill him." Seto almost whispers, and Yugi knows immediately he has switched to talking about Katsuya again.

"Please don't." Yugi has never understood the phrase between a rock and a hard place, until now. He loves them both so desperately. He is so angry at Jounouchi, sad for him, protective over him, frustrated- and a little bit of him hates that he couldn't kiss back the way he wanted. The Yugi that could have done that was long gone. Of course he loves Katsuya, and he only wishes he could up and disappear so that he did not have to handle this situation at all. He knows it's not a possibility; he has to be the buffer between Kaiba and Jounouchi now more than ever.

"I could kill him right in front of you and get away with it, easily." Seto muses, and Yugi feels sick. Sick because even humorously, Yugi can't stand the thought of one hair on Jounouchi's hair being out of place. Sick because he can't even be mad at Kaiba for being upset, and just… sick.

"Please don't say that." Yugi tries again, and this time his pitiful voice lands correctly. Seto smirks and holds him closer. He feels the warmth that comes with regaining control of a situation, per his own criteria. Seto wipes a tear away from Yugi's face, gently caressing his hand down his cheek and down to his throat. He wraps it around but does not squeeze, just a gentle pressure to remind Yugi who is in the drivers seat.

"I love you." Seto states, genuinely, the most warm thing that he has ever said. Yugi's ears ring. He feels as though Kaiba has created his own game, consisting of saying and doing the most fucked up things at the most fucked up times, and then reveling in the pain and confusion it brings his lover. He pulls it off better than anyone, and is always upping the ante. It takes his breath away.

"I- I love you too Seto."

Yugi feels a light ruffling in his hair that calls him from his sleep. Seto has spooned himself against his back and is stroking his hair, nuzzling his face into it in an attempt to wake him up gently. Yugi is so used to Seto getting up and leaving without a word, he is almost convinced it is a dream.

“What time is it?” He whispers, and can practically feel Seto’s delight that he has managed to wake him up.

“4:30. Shower with me.” He answers, and Yugi takes a moment to register it. Four in the morning is disgustingly early. Is he that dirty? Does he still smell Jounouchi on his skin?

“It's so early baby,” he groans back, the pet name feeling heavy and foreign on his tongue. Kaiba gently slides the hand that was ruffling his hair down to his hip and grips gently, grinding into him from behind. The heat sends a shiver down Yugi’s spine; he can feel exactly why Seto is asking him to shower with him now, pressed rock hard on his lower half. He sighs, relenting, and cranes his neck around to kiss him. “Fine, I can't say no to that..” He can always sleep later, he reasons.

Yugi starts to wake out of his haze a little as the water warms his body, Seto stepping behind him and wrapping his arms around him, Yugi’s body leaning into the touch by instinct. Even as adults, there is a good foot difference between the two, he feels as though Seto engulfs him physically and mentally.

Seto massages his hands through Yugi’s hair with some expensive smelling shampoo- Yugi notes absentmindedly that he seems to be very generous with the suds. Jounouchi’s scent is likely long gone but Kaiba seems determined to erase any trace of him. He doesn't overthink it- it's nice to have Seto fawning over him for whatever the reason may be.

Water makes awful lube, but that doesn't slow either of them down. The shower is a genuinely terrible place for sex, but Kaiba seems to have gotten it down to a science. He has Yugi propped up against the wall with ease, one leg wrapped around him as he pushes himself up inside him with some resistance created by the water. Yugi welcomes the pain, he's starting to crave it in a sick part of his brain.

“Are you still thinking about him?” Kaiba is buried to the hilt inside of him, face half an inch from his, searching as always for something he can never seem to find.

“Seto, please, I'm not.. I only want you.” He truly means it, he's almost positive. Seto pulls almost all the way out and slams back up into him, rough, and Yugi cries out in ecstasy.

“Where is your fucking pride? To let him touch you- touch what’s mine,” he growls between thrusts; Yugi is used to this switch during sex, the erratic behaviors, but this time it seems… different.

“How can you call yourself a man after what you let him do?” Seto’s voice is strange- far away. Yugi realizes finally that he is not talking to him, not really. He is talking to himself. This whole situation has unlocked something dark within Seto that he struggles to lock back away. It feels wrong to witness, but Yugi would gladly carry it for him if he could. He knows it's impossible. Being a focal point and a target is the closest he can get. He feels honored that Seto trusts him to be this outlet. He throws his head back and feels himself being filled up from inside, his own orgasm almost blurred away by being lost in his own mind.

Yugi lays back down in there bed with a towel underneath his damp hair, watching as Kaiba picks out clothes. He recognizes how heavy everything feels, just for a moment, that would snuff him out if he let it dwell for too long. Between the weight of his own demons that he refuses to face, he would surely be crushed. But he would gladly suffocate under whatever darkness Kaiba held underneath the surface, if it would let him breathe easier.

“I have a trip to the states next month,” Seto breaks the silence as he gets dressed, not bothering to turn to face Yugi. “We could get married then. I imagine your friends and family won't be very eager to attend after this week.” Yugi isn't sure if he means that, or if it is him who would prefer they were not around. He may not be entirely wrong.

“Just you, me and Mokuba- unless you would prefer some grand, flashy event.” There is a hint of a smile in his voice. He knows very well that Yugi hates to be the center of attention. Yugi laughs.

“Okay.. yeah. America next month. Let's do it.” He gives a small laugh, and recognizes how easily he has learned to roll with all the emotional punches. He rotates through emotions so fast in a day that he is not sure if he ever gets to genuinely feel a single one of them. Everything about Seto is so dizzying and drowning, most of all his love.

Jounouchi does not call, and Yugi is grateful and devastated all at the same time. He can't lose his best friend, but he does not know how to begin to talk about this with him. He does not know how to fix something that he did not break.

Yugi thinks back and *there they are, sprawled on the floor, the most secure Yugi has felt in months. Jounouchi has been his protector, his savior, and it felt unusually natural for them to kiss. Jounouchi met his lips and his body reacted; he melted into him, he let his tongue slip past his lips, he moaned into his mouth. It did not feel like betrayal or lust; it felt like an extension of bond, friendship and trust. The sound of Mokuba coming down the stairs from the second floor causes Yugi to pull back and immediately start accounting in his head all the reasons that this is a horrible idea.*

"Jou- we, I, I can't." He stutters out quickly, and Jounouchi looks even more stunned at the situation than Yugi feels. It felt unnaturally natural. Katsuya looks like he has seen a ghost.

"I don't know what happened. I'm sorry," he quickly fumbles out before standing up, reaching a hand out to Yugi to help him up as well. Mokuba gives a brief hi at the bottom of the stairs and is on the phone, barely acknowledging either of them as he walks past.

The silence is unbearable, so Jounouchi does what he does best. He talks himself out of it.

"Listen, I just wanted to stop by and.. and say everything that I said. I love you man, I mean that. I've gotta go though." He rambles, mentally out the door well before his body is. Yugi stands there long after he leaves.

Both Anzu and Honda have texted him individually, but he has not replied. The group chat has been silent. He is positive that by now, Jounouchi told them what he saw, and what happened after. One of these situations alone would have created total chaos, phone calls, text messages, unwarranted visits. Both of these situations on top of each other lead to confusion by all parties, he was sure. He can imagine Honda's voice asking "are any of my friends straight? What does that say about me?"

Kaiba had been acting relatively normal since that morning, and his outburst in the shower. Yugi had briefly wondered, jokingly, if Jou had not reached out because Seto had made good on his threat to kill him. He only knew this not to be true because Katsuya was active on

his social media accounts, no doubt just ignoring him, he thought a little bitterly.

Yugi was more perturbed than anything else by how Kaiba had seemingly moved on from this incident without any major crash outs. The calm before the storm, he assumed. He could only wait it out and see how to best calm its seas.

He knew, over everything else, that Seto ALWAYS got his.

Chapter End Notes

> I thought about writing some plot but I accidentally mostly just wrote porn. It be like that sometimes

Chapter 7: i promise you that it'll be fine

Chapter Summary

Yugi thinks about fate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jounouchi finally texted, two weeks later.

Yugi had thought to himself how stupid it was that one small (okay, it was not small,) incident had practically silenced their group chat and brought them all to a standstill. Yet, he had been unable to find it in himself to be the one to break the tension. An image of four hands with a crudely drawn smiley face came to mind- he cursed himself for being so afraid.

Since their early teen years, even back in the days where him and Katsuya's interactions were limited to playground bullying, he could not remember going this long without hearing his voice. It threw his world upside down- but it felt wrong to reach out first for a few reasons. It almost felt wrong to respond. Yugi knew he would have to navigate this bullshit situation with Seto and Katsuya eventually- he couldn't live without either of them.

Yugi opened the text.

are you mad at me still? Yugi laughed and wasted no time in calling him.

"I missed you. I wasn't mad," he said as soon as he heard the phone pick up, before Jounouchi could get a word out. He swore he could hear the relief before he had even said a word.

"I bet your hubby is probably pretty pissed off at me, huh?" He replies, a hint of humor but genuine concern in his voice. Yugi isn't sure whose wellbeing the concern is for; probably his, Jounouchi didn't have much in the way of self preservation.

"We will get through it." Yugi paused and thought for a moment on how he was going to separate his thoughts from one another. He couldn't imagine a world without both Seto and Katsuya. He, regrettably, knew he could not have them both in the capacity that

they wanted him. Neither of them were the sharing kind. *Life sucks sometimes*, he thought briefly. “I want us to get through it, too.” He added. He could hear him sigh.

“Listen, I know that was a shitty thing to spring on ya.. I don't regret it, but I know when I’m a day late and a dollar short.” Yugi could almost see Jounouchi nervously running his hands through his hair as he spoke. “But I can’t ever lose you, okay?”

“You won't, I'm not going anywhere.” Yugi felt like he had been saying a lot of that lately.

“You know, I've told you before and I’ll tell you again.. I will always go to hell and back for ya, Yuug,” Jounouchi sighed. “Sometimes I’d wish you'd stop going there, though.”

A low simmer of anxiety and anticipation set in his stomach immediately after he hung up. Logically, short of having their home or his phone wiretapped, Seto wouldn't know about their phone call. And Seto *should* know about their phone call. This was not something Yugi could hide from him forever. He wasn't built to be sneaky in that way; in fact, he knew it was ridiculous to be afraid to discuss his friend with Seto. Hiding things, holding secrets, it just felt juvenile. Yet, here he was, unable to bring himself to say anything to him about the phone call.

It almost felt like Seto already knew. Why did it fill him with dread?

He had been busy with work- they would be off to the US in a few short weeks and Seto had spent many late nights in the office preparing for everything to go smoothly. Yugi knew that he was being paranoid; Seto was busy and was running a multi-million dollar empire. He had more things to worry about than keeping tabs on him at all times. There was also a small part of him that knew, historically, Seto had always made the time to keep his every move filed away. He made himself disregard the thought.

Yugi had almost fallen asleep on the couch when he heard the living room door open. He had looked up expecting to see Mokuba, and was a little surprised to see his fiance in the doorway instead. He sat up and rubbed his eyes.

“Get dressed,” Seto said, without preamble. “We’re going to dinner.”

“Now? It’s almost nine.”

“I made a reservation. Wear something black.” He was already moving toward the bedroom, loosening his tie. “I’ve barely seen you in two weeks. I’d like to remedy that.”

It should have been sweet. Yugi felt his stomach drop through the floor, because Seto saying *I’d like to remedy that* in that flat even voice could mean dinner, or could mean something with teeth in it, and after two weeks of held breath Yugi genuinely could not tell which. He cursed himself out mentally, *Stop being so goddamn afraid all of the time.* He followed behind him to get dressed, swearing that the tension felt palatable.

And it had only grown worse in the car.

Yugi knew the moment that he sat down in the passenger seat that Seto knew *something* . He had grown so accustomed to analyzing his body language, his movements, his every breath, to try and get any kind of read on him at any given moment. It didn't take long for Kaiba to break the silence.

“Say his name,” Seto said, low and terrible, eyes on the road. “You’ve been carrying it around for two weeks like I can’t see it. Say it.”

“Seto, come on-”

“You let him put his filthy mouth on you and you’ve been bragging with your whole body for fucking days and you think I haven’t noticed. I notice everything. I have always noticed everything about you.” His hands were tighter on the wheel now, but his face betrayed none of the venom of his words. Yugi turned to look out the window.

“I gave you the silence as a kindness. Do you understand that? I could have burned it all down. I chose not to. And you’ve spent every day since flinching like I’m going to.”

“Because you are,” Yugi said, exasperated, and it came out louder than he meant, two weeks of dread finding a crack. “Because that’s what you do, Seto, it’s not even worth an argument because you won't let yourself be wrong. I just don't know what you want from me.” He could see his reaction was not the one that Kaiba had hoped for, and saw the shift in his demeanor to find a new way to seek it out.

“I could just end it.” An old threat, flat and familiar, no bite behind it. Yugi ignored it, well aware that this would piss him off more than

anything.

“Where are you taking us, exactly?” He had a realization as he looked out the window that they were driving away from the city, but he had a sinking feeling he knew the answer. It would be a strange coincidence to take the same way that he would take to Katsuya’s apartment.

“I could kill both of us. Here. At least then I know he will never get a chance to touch you again. You made up with him, didn’t you?”

Yugi didn’t flinch at the threat. He knew that keeping anything from Seto was a lost cause. He thought, absently, that he should really stop getting in vehicles with his impulsive future husband. Maybe he should learn to drive, and keep him out from behind a wheel. He felt numb- he knew Seto was just looking to strike a cord so that Yugi would fight back. Old tricks from their childhood, throwing blows until something stuck.

“That’s probably our fate, anyway, do you think?” There was an almost humorous lilt to Yugi’s sad voice.

For whatever reason, that one landed in the car like a struck match. Seto’s head turned. For a long second he looked at Yugi and something moved behind his eyes that Yugi couldn’t name, and then, slowly, watching Yugi the whole time, Seto lifted both hands off the wheel and held them up, surrendering.

“Why don't you decide,” Seto said. In another context, he may have even sounded romantic. “You’ve spent our whole relationship letting me steer. Your whole life letting Atem steer, sacrificing for others but never regarding yourself. So decide, Yugi. Right now. What’s our fate?” Yugi couldn't help but note, in the back of his mind, the deeply seductive drawl that Seto had suddenly taken on.

The car ran on straight and fast under nobody’s control, the road unspooling in the headlights, and Yugi looked at the empty wheel and felt something reckless and alive roaring up through his chest. He wasn’t thinking about dying. That wasn’t it. He was thinking, for one instant, about choosing. About being, for the first time in his adult life, the one whose hands were on the wheel. About lifting that brush and finally, painting *something* on the blank canvas that was his future.

He didnt’t think, he just grabbed it. He wrenched it hard, off the road.

Wrecking was not as loud as he imagined, or perhaps the noise was

drowned out by the deafening silence of his own decisions. It was over in a matter of seconds as they broke through a particularly rusted section of a guard rail and clipped a lone tree hard enough to partially rip off the front wheel before they stopped. Seto's eyes had widened for just a moment at the action but he did not flinch, and let the impact rock him against the steering wheel, then airbag, without bracing himself.

Yugi acknowledged the faint hiss of something coming from the engine as he also settled against the airbag, the dust of the deployed bags settling like snow. The adrenaline kicked in almost immediately- Yugi's heart was slamming, his mouth tasted of copper. Seto had let off of the gas the moment he let go of the wheel.

"Why didn't you stop me?" Yugi's voice came out cracked and strange in the sudden quiet. Was he shaking? "You could have stopped me. You're stronger than me, you could have- you let me. You knew what I was going to do."

Seto was looking at him through the settling dust, blood at his temple, entirely calm, and not, Yugi realized, remotely shaken.

"Our fates have always been intertwined," Seto said. Certain. "Whatever happens to you happens to me. I've always just been following your lead. I've just been waiting for you to realize it." Yugi could sense there was more he wanted to say, but they both let it fall to the wayside as something in the general area of the car engine made an unpleasant bang.

He got out of the car without any particular urgency. Yugi heard the door, the crunch of glass under his shoes, watched him move around the wreck in the red glow of the one taillight still working. And then Seto stopped. He came around to Yugi's side, and he crouched down to look at him through a spider webbed window, and all the composure went out of his face for a split second. He opened the door and took Yugi's chin in his hand, turned it toward the moonlight and looked; not searching, for once- it felt as if he was genuinely just looking at Yugi for himself.

"You're all right," Seto said, and it wasn't a question, and it wasn't for Yugi.

Seto offered his hand out to Yugi and helped him out of the passenger side door, shutting the door behind him and watching pieces of the window scatter out of it as it slammed. He rolled his eyes as if the car

had personally offended him. He had liked this car, and felt a mild annoyance that he would need to pick up another one.

He turned to Yugi and gently cupped his face in his hands, looking down into his eyes, the moonlight illuminating his bright violet eyes and accentuating the shadows cast by his long lashes and sharp cheek bones. He drew him in for a kiss. Yugi stumbled back for a moment, dizzy from the rush and the impact, but let himself sink into the kiss as he always did. Seto pulled back for just a moment and brushed some debris off his cheek. Yugi noted the blood on Kaiba's forehead making its way down to his cheek and reached up to wipe it away, but Kaiba quickly snatched his wrist and stared him down.

In an instant Kaiba had Yugi pushed against the back passenger door, which still remained relatively unharmed. Yugi pulled Seto back against his body and kissed him, gentle and certain, his hands sliding into Seto's hair, and Seto made a needy sound against his mouth that Yugi had never heard from him before; it sent fire straight to his lower stomach.

Seto stripped Yugi's shirt over his head and started to pressed his mouth to every mark the crash had left, the burn on his arm, the welt blooming at his collarbone, tender in such a way that almost felt like another man. Yugi got Seto's shirt open with shaking fingers and ran his palms flat over his pale chest, over the heartbeat hammering under his visible ribs, and Seto shuddered. Yugi was entranced by his every small reaction- like the tide had finally pulled itself back enough that he was able to find the shore.

"Down here," Yugi murmured, and drew him off the metal and into the cool grass of the embankment, the warm night and star-scattered above them, and Seto followed, as Yugi was beginning to notice that he always did, and covered him, the weight of him settling over Yugi.

Seto placed several kisses down his jaw and neck as he opened him slowly, both of them briefly illuminated by passing headlights. Neither paid close attention, although Seto admired how beautiful Yugi looked once again in the pale moonlight as the car passed. The car did not slow down and neither did they. Kaiba had worked in three fingers and Yugi arched up into each stroke, gasping into the dark, grass cool against his back and Seto hot above him, and when he begged it wasn't out of fear or performance, it was just unadulterated want.

"Please," Yugi breathed against his jaw. "I want to feel you. All of you. Please, Seto-"

“God, I've been waiting to hear you say that,” Yugi blushed at the unfamiliar sincerity in his voice. Seto lined himself up and pushed in slowly, up over his fingers as he pulled them out, both of them groaning loudly into the night, and then he was buried deep and still, his forehead dropped to Yugi’s, both of them breathing hard.

“Look at me,” he said, rough. “I want you to only think about me.” If Yugi wasn't mistaken, it almost sounded like begging. He would never say that out loud to him- he loved it.

Yugi looked at him, and they moved together in the grass under the indifferent stars with their eyes locked and their hands laced above Yugi’s head, and it was the most naked either of them had ever been, in every sense there was. Seto set a deep, rolling, unhurried rhythm, drawing it out, zero urgency despite the circumstances. The world had fallen away around them a long time ago. There was only the two of them.

“Shit,” Seto’s control was fraying, his voice coming apart at the edges, “I love you,” There was a desperation to his voice that Yugi had only heard once- years ago, that did not even sound like it belonged to Kaiba.

“I love you and I don’t know what the fuck I'm doing,” He rambled out, thrusts becoming more erratic as he neared his orgasm. “I’m going to spend the rest of our lives doing it wrong and I am never letting you go.” It didn't sound like a threat, or even a promise this time. It sounded like a genuine confession, a practical wedding vow. Yugi clamped his muscles down as he grabbed fistfuls of the grass beneath him, eliciting a cry of pleasure from Seto.

“I love you too,” Yugi gasped, and he meant every broken piece of it, “I love you,” and he reached down between them, but Seto’s hand was already there, closing around him, stroking him in time, foreheads pressed together, breath ragged, the whole doomed truth of their relationship poured into the space where their bodies met.

Yugi came first, arching up off the grass, crying out into the warm night as it tore through him, spilling over both their hands. Seto followed a heartbeat later, and for the second time since Yugi had known him, he didn’t hide behind a facade; he broke, a low helpless sound wrenched out of him, his face buried in Yugi’s throat, his whole body shaking as he emptied himself deep inside of him. Yugi noticed the tears on Seto’s face- he guessed they both got the reactions they had wanted tonight after all.

They stayed tangled in the grass, sweat-damp and blood-streaked and spent, Seto's weight a warm anchor over Yugi's body, neither of them in any hurry to move. Seto pressed slow kisses to the side of Yugi's face, his temple, the cut at his hairline, the almost fully healed cut above his eyebrow, gentle now. Yugi wrapped his arms around the broad back of the most dangerous mortal man he had ever loved and held him under the enormous sky and felt, for one perfect terrible moment, completely at peace.

"We should get up," Seto murmured eventually, into his neck, not moving. "Before someone passing by calls the cops."

"In a minute," Yugi said.

"In a minute," Seto agreed, and stayed exactly where he was, and held him, and for that one minute in the wreckage of everything they had chosen, it was enough; it was, impossibly, everything.

Seto called Isono.

"We need a ride." He said coolly, doing one last survey of the wreckage. "And a tow truck. Call them after you get us."

Yugi could hear the faint sound of panic on the other line, and saw what looked like a flicker of amusement on Kaiba's face.

"Mind your business. Just get here." He hung up the phone and stood for a moment, taking a last glance at the car.

Yugi sat on the cool grass of the embankment while they waited, knees pulled up, and Seto lowered himself down beside him, close, their shoulders touching, and for a while neither of them said anything at all. The wreck cooled behind them, the night was warm, the moon full, and the two of them sat in the middle of it: bathed in moonlight, banged up and bloodied and impossibly, stupidly alive.

Yugi thought about Jounouchi. The same Jounouchi who promised to stand on the edge of the River Styx with him; who had pulled him out of the depths of the ocean and dragged him out of burning buildings and had pledged loyalty at every corner of their lives. He turned it over, the way he'd been turning everything over, and beside him he could feel the warmth of Seto, who had never once in his life promised to pull anyone out of anything but seemed to follow him devotedly into Hell anyway.

He thought, briefly, for a moment about Atem. And how just the thought of him felt like exposing raw nerves to air, and how he had left Yugi with the best and worst attributes he had of his personality. Who had taught him that life wasn't meant to be easy and pain wasn't linear, and happy endings were a finality that the living couldn't be afforded if they wanted to keep moving forward. How everything from the day he had solved the Millenium puzzle had lead him to this exact moment, in the moonlight, basking in the afterglow of whatever the hell was wrong with him. He hung his head in his hands for a moment.

“Jounouchi-kun told me he’d always come for me,” Yugi said, quietly, to the dark. He didn’t fully know why he said it. Maybe because the night had already stripped everything else away. “If it all fell apart. He said he’d always be the one to pull me out.”

He felt Seto go still beside him. Not angry. Considering.

“He’s a better man than I am, braver perhaps.” Seto said finally, as though letting go of a breath, and there was no bitterness in it. He turned his head, and in the dark his face was open in a way Yugi had almost never seen, bloodied and all.

“I can’t pull you out of anything, Yugi. I'm not trying to be your keeper. You're not a child.” He sounded pleasant but stern; the one person in Yugi’s life who had always treated him as an equal, a force to be reckoned with as opposed to something fragile. He supposed he took that for granted at times.

“But I’d get in the water with you. I’d drown with you if that’s what it took. And I think,” his voice caught, just slightly, “I think you already knew that. I think that’s why you’re still here.”

Yugi’s eyes stung.

“We’re not okay,” Yugi said. It wasn’t an accusation. It was almost a relief to say it out loud, under the indifferent sky. “You know that, right? There is only so much one person can carry before it catches up to them.”

“I know,” Seto said.

“I’m not sure what changed, I’m not sure either of us make the other one better anymore, under all that weight.”

“I know that too,” Seto said again, and took his hand, lacing their

fingers together.

“I’m choosing it anyway,” Yugi finished, very quietly. “Because I think we still can. Be better, that is.” He finally lifted his head. “I think that's our fate.”

“Then we understand each other.” Seto brought their joined hands up and pressed his mouth to Yugi’s knuckles. “We always have.”

Headlights appeared far down the road, he presumed it to be Isono. Yugi watched them grow, and did not let go of Seto’s hand; two people who did not know how to save themselves, and always missing the mark- sitting in the wreckage of hundreds of choices they’d made together. Refusing, against all sense, to let it go. Perhaps naively, Yugi couldn't help but feel as though something had, for the better, shifted between them.

The headlights slowed. Seto stood, and offered Yugi his hand, and pulled him up out of the grass, and did not let go of him the whole way to the car.

Chapter End Notes

> I debated ending this here, i felt like i had more to say and nothing to say all at once and thought maybe leaving things ambiguous and is for the best, just as real life sometimes there are no real magical solutions.
>
> Side end note - i am a professional who works with a vulnerable population who are more likely to experience and participate in dv, i also write from the depths of lived personal experiences, so let me stand on my soapbox for a second and provide this resource for anyone who may need it
>
> https://www.justice.gov/ovw/resources-victims-and-survivors
>
> Thanks for reading

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